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League Week

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See pages 16-17

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SUPER SEMI

The Eels may
be fizzling, but
Radradra is sizzling!



LOCK 'EM UP

Broncos move
quickly to keep gun
halves long-term



MASE IS ACE

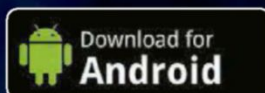
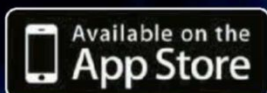
Big Willie talks bad
raps, bad haircuts
and good mates



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SUPER RAD!

The Eels are fizzling, but winger Semi Radradra is sizzling **BY TONY ADAMS**

HIS EELS ARE BATTERED, bruised and battling, but cult-hero winger Semi Radradra is the most valuable player in the NRL – that’s the shock finding of a special *RLW* investigation this week.

With the assistance of the statistical experts from Sportsdata, *RLW* examined the Contributor Value Rating – or CVR – of every player in the NRL, and Radradra emerged top of the pile.

With his ability to score tries out of nothing and run the Eels out of trouble near their own tryline, the Fijian flyer has the top average rating in 2015.

The CVRs are based on Major League Baseball’s ‘Moneyball’ concept, where players are ranked not on reputation, or salary, but purely on the numbers they crunch out on the field.

One of the CVRs’ founders, stats guru Will Badel, isn’t surprised by Radradra’s result.

“The fact he’s playing on the end of a struggling backline, yet is leading the league in CVRs, shows he’s a very special player,” Badel says.

“He’s scoring tries, which is obviously a winger’s main job, and they rank highly in CVRs because they are major events in games.

“But he’s also making the hard yards on kick returns, taking the pressure off his forwards and getting the Eels on the front foot.

“All those factors are earning him points.”

Badel says the CVR concept was pioneered by Sportsdata’s Andrew Moufarrige seven years ago.

“We analysed the NYC also and the two top scorers that year were Daly Cherry-Evans and Kieran Foran,” he says.

“Both have gone on to become superstars, so it goes to show what an accurate indicator and useful tool the CVRs are.”

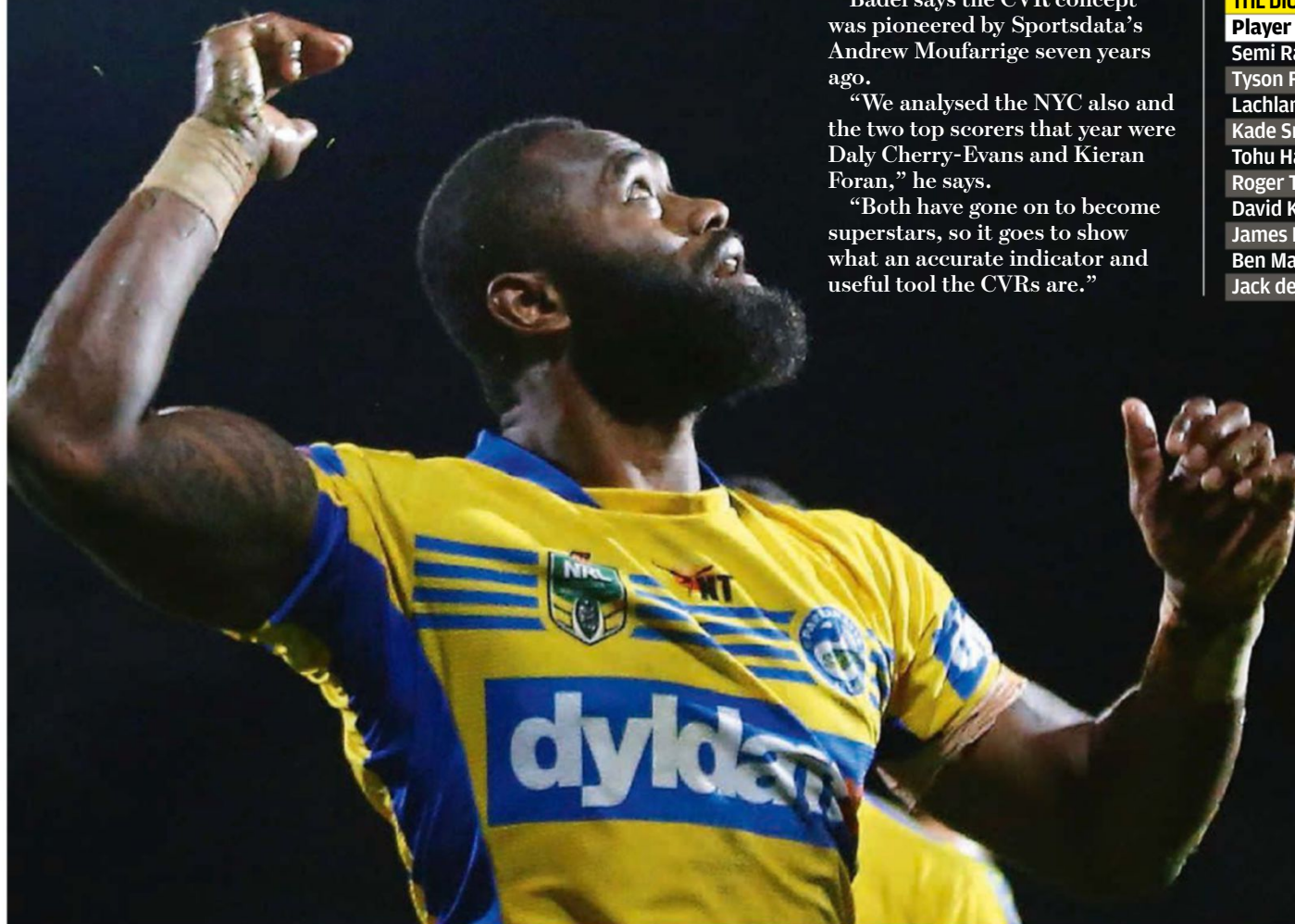
Radradra is also the biggest improver in the NRL based on the CVRs. Of all those who played at least half the season in 2014, Radradra is by far the most improved, up almost 203 points per game on last year’s 289.98.

Last year rampaging Rabbitoh Sam Burgess finished top of the CVRs, with Jarryd Hayne close behind.

● For full report, turn to Pages 14-15 *RLW*

THE BIG IMPROVERS

Player (club)	2014	2015	Change
Semi Radradra (Eels)	289.98	507.01	+202.84
Tyson Frizell (Dragons)	238.99	407.21	+168.22
Lachlan Maranta (Broncos)	160.22	317.57	+157.35
Kade Snowden (Knights)	285.01	425.06	+140.05
Tohu Harris (Storm)	255.58	393.21	+137.63
Roger Tuivasa-Sheck (Roosters)	293.05	424.67	+131.62
David Klemmer (Bulldogs)	179.45	310.77	+131.32
James Roberts (Titans)	215.73	345.11	+129.38
Ben Matulino (Warriors)	276.99	403.46	+126.47
Jack de Belin (Dragons)	268.01	379.71	+111.70





'Greg Bird will 100,000 per cent be in Titans gear next year'

Birdy won't be flying the coop . . . but Dave Taylor's future is still very much up in the air

BY JOEL GOULD

GREG BIRD IS STAYING AT the Titans in 2016. The club, the NSW Origin star and his agent agree on that.

Enigmatic forward Dave Taylor is another story.

Taylor wants to honour his contract at the Titans which expires at the end of 2016, but there is a Mexican stand-off regarding his future.

The Titans will allow Taylor to sign with another club next year, but he's settled on the Gold Coast and in no hurry to accommodate that desire.

Taylor and Bird soak up more than \$1 million of the club's salary cap, both will face court again in October over drugs charges and

both have pleaded not guilty. It's unclear whether a rival club could sign them, even if they wanted to, before that drugs case is resolved.

But Bird is signed at the Gold Coast until the end of 2017 and his agent Chris Orr says he's going nowhere, despite being linked to the Sea Eagles, Raiders and Knights earlier this year.

"Greg will 100,000 per cent be in Titans gear next year," Orr says.

"No-one has called me from the club to suggest otherwise, nor has my client ever asked me to look for another club.

"He loves the club, he has a business on the Gold Coast where he runs a cafe on the beach, his wife has a hairdressing business and he is just about to buy a brand new home on the water."

Bird is close to Raiders coach Ricky Stuart but Orr says that doesn't mean he will be off to the nation's capital any time soon.

"If Greg Bird plays at the Raiders next year, I will run nude from the Gold Coast to Brisbane," he says.

Orr says 30-year-old Bird will be

vindicated when the court case is completed.

"The legal system will take care of itself and we're very confident that it will come out our way," Orr says.

"The accusations have no substance to them at all."

The other options for Taylor are playing Super League, Japanese rugby or the Titans footing part of the bill for him to play with another NRL club. The Titans will let him go if he can get a deal, but Taylor won't be forced out the door easily.

He's far from one of the Titans worst performers and foundation Gold Coast winger Chris Walker insists he still has much to offer.

"Big Dave has got more skill in his little finger than I have in my whole body," says Walker, who now plays with the Ipswich Jets.

"It's all about whether he realises how good he can be and whether he can get his head right outside of football.

"If the Titans don't keep him then I'm sure a change will be as good as a holiday for him, and maybe that's what he needs."

I'M SICK OF THE EXCUSES!

BIG AARON WOODS IS FED UP.

Fed up with losing NRL matches. And fed up with hearing excuses about the Tigers being a young, developing team.

The Tigers have again been a major disappointment in 2015 and are closer to the wooden spoon than finals contention.

Pundits and club officials say the Tigers are a young team that needs time to match the NRL's big guns.

But the Tigers' Test prop will have none of it. To him, that's just a 'cop-out'.

"I've heard it and heard it and heard it all before," a fired-up Woods bristles.

"It's just an excuse and I'm sick of hearing that we're just kids and need experience.

"That's a cop-out - we have to realise we're not kids any more.

"Most of our young guys have been in the NRL for a season or two now and that's plenty of time to get up to speed and know what's expected.

"We should be mentally tougher and it's a lack of concentration over 80 minutes that has been costing us games - not youth.

"We seem to be only playing for 60 minutes every week and rival teams are just waiting for us to drop our bundle.

"It has been a harsh lesson for our young guys, 'Welcome to first grade', but the penny should have dropped by now.

"There are games we should have won that we've lost and those are the ones that hurt you.

"They're the difference between being in finals contention and being down the ladder in the position we find ourselves in now.

"It's time for us to grow up and go into games convinced we can beat anyone.

"That confidence just doesn't seem there at the moment."

TONY ADAMS

LOCK THEM UP AND THROW AWAY THE KEY!



The Broncos are looking deep into the future with gun halves Ben Hunt and Anthony Milford

BY JOEL GOULD

BRONCOS HALF BEN HUNT wants to play alongside Anthony Milford for the rest of his career . . . and he's set to get his wish.

The two halves have been in superb form for the top-of-the-table Broncos, with coach Wayne Bennett hailing the duo the best pairing at Red Hill since Allan Langer and Kevin Walters reigned supreme.

Both Hunt, 25 and Milford, 21, are contracted until November 1, 2017,

but the Broncos are already moving to keep them together for the rest of the decade . . . and beyond.

A new NRL rule will be introduced to prevent clubs from approaching the pair until November 2016.

But *RLW* has learned Brisbane will take steps to ensure they are both re-signed long-term before that date and will leave funds in the cap to ensure that happens.

Bennett has said he hopes the duo can be together at the Broncos for the long haul, as Walters and Langer were when they starred together in four premiership wins in 1992-93 and 1997-98.

Walters, now Bennett's assistant coach, says "the old fella has got it right . . . again".

"All the great clubs have shown over time that if you can hang onto your decent halves you can build

players and good things around that," Walters says. "Obviously it's the same with Ben and Anthony. Wayne (Bennett) has hit the nail on the head, and because they're so young we're only just scratching the surface with their potential and where they can take this club.

"With me and Alf . . . and Kerrod, we were all great mates and we never wanted to leave. It was a great club with a great environment and we were always happy here.

"Everyone gets offers in their career, but when you're happy, that means more than anything.

"Anthony has just come to the club and Ben has been here since he was 14 or 15 on development programs. They both seem happy, and it would be good if we can keep them together because they're two special players."

Hunt is aware of the great Broncos

history that Langer and Walters helped create and wants Milford by his side so the pair can create their own legendary deeds.

"That's what Kevvie and Alf did – they were great players and stuck together for a long time, and that's why they were able to play some great footy throughout their careers," Hunt says. "Any half would want their halves partner with them for their whole career and I'm no different.

"Especially a player like Anthony Milford. He's an excellent talent and I'd love to have him outside me for the rest of my career at the Broncos.

"Milf takes a lot of pressure off me. He's a great attacking weapon and they have to respect him on his side of the field, as well as the other side.

"He's getting better every week but as a combination I think there's still some improvement to come." **RLW**

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PAGE 40

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THIS WEEK ON RUGBYLEAGUEWEEK.COM.AU

MONDAY

THE WEEKEND WRAP

Catch up on all the latest news from round 20. Plus, we'll bring you full coverage of the Cowboys-Eels clash in Monday Night Football.

TUESDAY

SUPERSTAR CENTRAL

Check out RLW's exclusive player ratings and Team of the Week from round 20, along with all the NRL's stats leaders.

WEDNESDAY

HUMP DAY!

Beat those mid-week blues by catching up on all the latest rugby league news from around the world.

THURSDAY

TOP PERFORMERS

We unveil RLW's Rising Rookie from round 20 and bring you an update on RLW's Player of the Year leaderboard.

FRIDAY

TIPS AND PREVIEWS

Get all the late mail for round 21 – including all the late withdrawals and inclusions. And see who our expert tipsters pick in RLW's Hot Tips.

SATURDAY

SUPER SATURDAY

We bring you the wash-up from Friday Night Footy, then provide comprehensive coverage of the Warriors-Sharks, Cowboys-Raiders and Sea Eagles-Broncos games.

SUNDAY

CLASH OF THE BEACHES

We preview the Dragons-Knights and Rabbitohs-Panthers clashes... then log on at full-time for a comprehensive wrap-up, plus analysis.

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THE MOLE

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SHARKS RILE RICKY

CANBERRA AND THE SHARKS are locked in a bitter battle over one member of the 'Cronulla Four' sacked after ASADA's investigation into the Sharks' controversial 2011 supplements program. Highly regarded physiotherapist Konrad Schultz was terminated by Cronulla before being given a chance at Canberra in 2013.

Remarkably, Cronulla are making moves to lure Schultz back – and Raiders coach Ricky Stuart exploded when he learned of the attempt recently. Stuart fired a strongly worded text to Sharks high performance manager Andrew Gray and relations between the two clubs have gone very frosty as Schultz ponders his future. Raiders players are all desperate for Schultz to stay, with several telling me his hard work had taken weeks off their time on the sidelines recovering from injury.



Scan this page for more fresh scoops from The Mole

HOUSO MAY GET NEW HOME

Veteran back-rower **Chris Houston** still has a year to run on his contract in 2016, but Newcastle are prepared to release him if he can get a long-term deal in England. After debuting for the Dragons in 2007, Houston joined the Knights the following season and has given the club great service, prompting the Knights to allow the 30-year-old forward to explore his options.

RULE CHANGE TO AID ROOS

The NRL has been accused of reducing the interchange in a desperate bid to boost the Kangaroos' chances of beating the Kiwis. Warrington coach **Tony Smith** believes the current 10 substitutions favours New Zealand's bigger forwards. "I'm not convinced about it and I'm not sure it does what they're saying it does," Smith says. "I think there's other reasons . . . the Australians can't beat New Zealand at the moment and that's when rule changes usually happen over there." Super League has no plans to follow the NRL's lead in cutting the interchanges . . . yet. But the UK competition may reduce the number of allowed substitutions, from 10 to eight, from 2017.

MOZ EYES HISTORY BOOKS

Former Roosters cult hero **Adrian Morley** has his sights on a place in the book of Guinness World Records. The 38-year-old is among a group of charity fund-raisers climbing Mount Kilimanjaro – including former GB prop **Barrie McDermott** and *Harry Potter* actor **Matthew Lewis** – later this year. And they will play a full 80-minute league game, refereed by ex-international whistleblower **Steve Ganson**, at Kosovo Camp (5760m) in an attempt to claim the record for the highest-altitude match in history. Morley is set to call time on his 20-year professional career at the end of this season with English outfit Salford.

'IT'S A PITY'

RLW's cover story last week that **Benji Marshall** could play for Scotland in the 2016 Four Nations created quite a stir around the rugby league world. The day after the story went to press, the Scotland Rugby League confirmed it had checked out Benji's qualifications as his ancestors hailed from Scotland. But Marshall says it won't be happening. "It's a pity because he would have been great for us and the boys were very keen for him to play," Scotland coach Steve McCormack told me.



HOT GOSSIP

Ben Barba's younger brother Marmin is in hot demand from UK clubs. A consistent tryscorer at Queensland Cup level for Ipswich Jets, Barba was linked to a move to rugby union last year but it never happened. He's desperate to follow Ben into top flight football and the 24-year-old may take his chances in Super League in the hope of eventually landing an NRL gig down the track.

Don't be surprised if veteran Eels centre Beau Champion hangs up his boots at the end of the season. The former Rabbitoh, who represented City Origin and the Indigenous All Stars in 2010-11, has had a wretched run of injuries over the past few seasons. A fine attacking player on his day, he is still only 28, but is off contract at year's end and may be forced to give the game away unless his bad luck with injury changes quickly.

RYAN'S FLYIN'

Consistent winger **Ryan Morgan** is close to signing a new deal at the Eels. Morgan has agreed to terms and only needs to put pen to paper to formalise the deal. The local junior has proven a reliable player – and regular tryscorer – at NRL level since debuting in round 1, 2011, and can play both centre and wing.

POM'S SWAN SONG

Former Sharks star **Ben Pomeroy** is considering one last crack at the NRL after a successful stint with French club Catalans. Pomeroy is still only 31 and, with class centres in short supply, could get himself a gig. I revealed a week ago his Catalans team-mate **Michael Oldfield** is set for an NRL return with Souths in 2016.

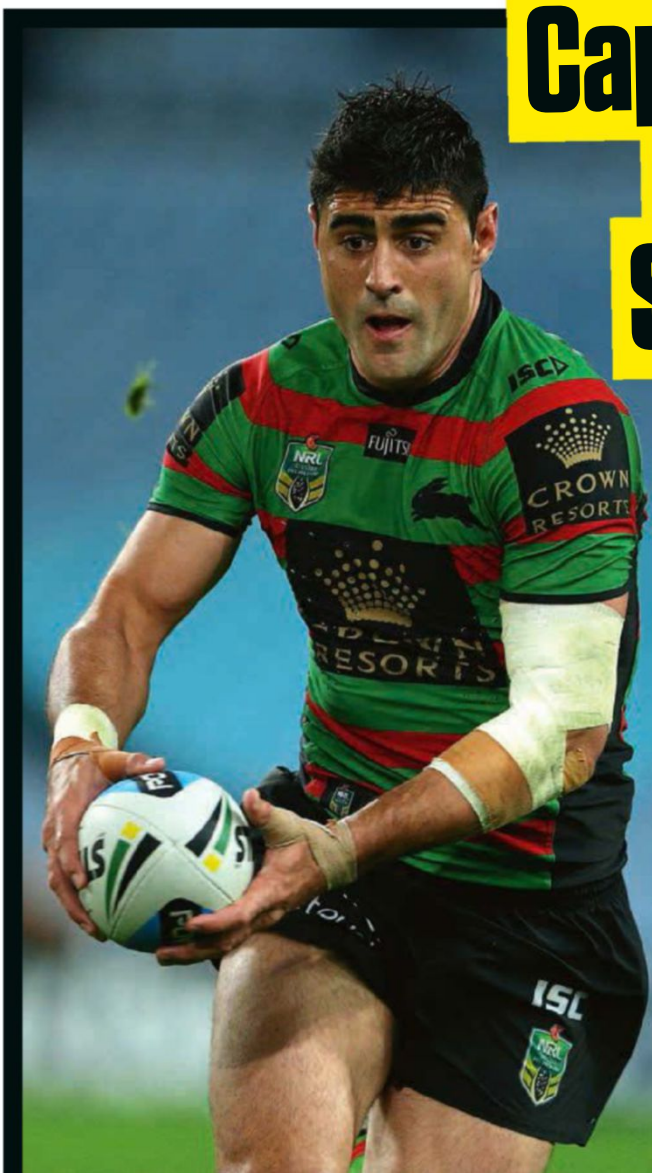
COWBOY COUP

The Cowboys have signed promising Titans Holden Cup fullback **Shaun Hudson** for next season. A speedster with the ability to find the line, Hudson was offered a full-time deal by the Titans but decided on the move north to Townsville, where he will be **Lachlan Coote's** deputy. The youngster got a taste of NRL footy in the trials at the start of the season and looked right at home – he's got the goods.

HULL OF A TIME

Ex-Titan **Steve Michaels** is set to extend his spell in England. The 27-year-old, who has been in strong form for Hull FC, is out of contract. Earlier this year, Michaels was the subject of an arrest warrant in Queensland as part of an investigation into drug trafficking but, after being dropped for a game, has continued to play – and play well.

Cap doesn't fit for Souths



THE SALARY CAP WILL force Souths to make some tough decisions over the coming weeks. The premiers' salary-cap curse has hit hard at Redfern, with the Bunnies forced to pay premium dollar to keep the likes of Luke Keary, Adam Reynolds and Chris Grevsmuhl. As a result, players will have to be cut. Joel Reddy won't be offered a new deal and there might not be enough money left in the kitty to keep Bryson Goodwin (left) either, even though Souths want to keep him. Back-rower Ben Lowe is another club favourite who is unlikely to be re-signed. The Rabbitohs are close to re-signing promising rookie back Aaron Gray and also need to find money to keep grand final centre Kirsome Auva'a and up-and-comer John Olive.

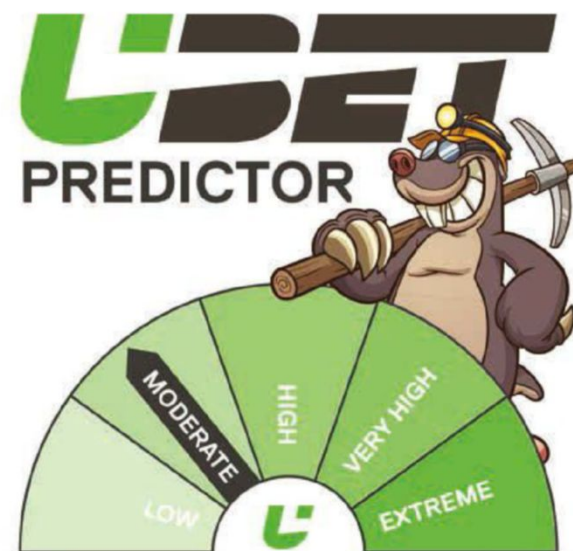
TITANS KEEN ON KELLY

The Titans have managed to keep one of their best up-and-comers, NSW Under-20s Origin star **Brian Kelly**. A skilful five-eighth or half who bears a strong resemblance to his cousin **Albert Kelly**, the 19-year-old helped the Blues beat Queensland in the curtain-raiser to Origin Three and could well be starting in first grade next season. Souths were keen to sign the youngster – and his retention is a major shot in the arm for the Titans.

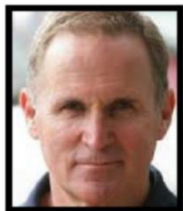


LEEDS LEAD HUNT FOR NO.7

Knights halfback **Tyrone Roberts** is on the outer at Newcastle – and could be headed to Leeds next year. He's under contract until the end of 2016, but with **Trent Hodkinson** arriving, the Knights won't stand in his way if he can get a deal elsewhere. Several British clubs are keen, but the Rhinos are the early favourites to get him.



Chances of Tyrone Roberts being at the Knights next year


**BRIAN
SMITH**

Reduced interchange — it won't work!

**SURE, THE RULE CHANGE
WILL SPEED UP THE GAME
... BUT THE QUALITY OF
PLAY WILL BE DOWN**

A LOT OF PEOPLE SEEM TO think reducing the number of interchanges next season will be the NRL's silver bullet. A rule change that will speed up the game, and allow the little men to run rings around tired, lumbering forwards. A rule change that will make games more entertaining than ever.

I'm not so sure.

The NRL's decision to reduce the number of interchanges from 10 to eight might speed up the game...

but I can tell you it will also make it duller.

Go back a couple of decades to when the League changed the play-the-ball rule, banning the marker from striking for the ball. The play-the-ball speed increased and became quicker and quicker every year.

It reached ridiculous proportions during the Super League period when there were no markers at all as tacklers were required to 'roll away'. The middle third of the defensive line was unable to control the attack at all and the result was a game that descended into something more like touch footy than rugby league. It caused the greatest imbalance between attack and defence in the game's history.

Having most sets start at one end of the field and finish at the other was very dull and lopsided. Tries

were racked up like never before, as defence was totally devalued.

We realised two things: defence is the cornerstone of the game and should *never* be devalued, and any rule changes must be better thought-out in the future.

Now, we're looking at a rule change that goes against both those notions.

As I said, the interchange reduction is apparently designed to assist the little men in the game. Or more pointedly, make the bigger guys suffer even more.

My guess is that won't happen. I think that most of those bigger dudes – especially the really good ones – won't be affected too much. They will adjust pretty quickly and the guys around them will, too.

What it will result in, though, is more props with a higher aerobic capacity, but with less power and

explosiveness. You can't tell me that reducing the amount of times a tearaway prop rips through a defensive line will make the game more entertaining!

And it's still not likely to produce the desired result of 'bringing back the little men'.

In any case, the essence of this rule change is flawed.

Big fellas don't just get tired from defence. Attacking will tire them out, too. And when they do begin to tire, the quickest adjustment will be to let them rest while in possession. And this is where the game will *really* suffer. It will lead to a far more conservative and error-free style of attack from players desperate to not allow their opponents to have the ball at any cost.

And don't get too excited if we do get more tries next season because



DON'T GET TOO COCKY!

Little men such as James Segeyaro (left) won't have it all their own way against big boppers like Jared Waerea-Hargreaves (right) under the NRL's interchange overhaul.

chances are – just like that Super League period – most of them will be uncontested, with the defence unable to function at a high standard due to deterioration of their whole team, not just those poor old front-rowers.

More tries does not necessarily mean a more entertaining match!

I can see the game being plunged back to decades long past.

The ball will be kicked into touch way more often when teams are ahead on the scoreboard. More dead time.

And 'fake' injuries will return. God knows we have enough of them now, with referees terrified of taking the ball from an obviously uninjured ball-carrier playing doggy. It will become an epidemic if we're not careful!

But the other, more serious, impact will be an increase in the number of actual injuries. The interchange reduction will force players to play

on while legitimately injured. More games will be decided by the luck involved with whether your team has finished the game with one or two players still on the bench or none like your opponents.

This will have long-term impact, too – players remaining on the field while injured will increase the risk of degree and degeneration of their injury. Instead of a one- or two-week lay-off, there will be more players out for four and six weeks.

Finally, I see that it still takes a 'frontie' to add some levity to the whole thing. Roosters book-end Jared Waerea-Hargreaves suggests it will be a good thing because the new rule will mean those front-rowers will get more playing time.

Hmmm . . . with thinking like that, he could find himself chair of the rule changes committee! RLW

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'He's grown up a lot as a result of what happened'

It hasn't been easy, but Issac Luke has managed to turn a negative into a positive **BY GREG PRICHARD**



ISSAC LUKE STILL FINDS it hard to talk about the disappointment of missing last year's drought-breaking grand final win.

But he insists it's made him a stronger person.

Luke is in a precarious position – stuck in limbo between not wanting to dwell on last year's disappointment, and not getting caught up thinking about his shift across the Tasman to the Warriors next year. After all, there's a premiership to defend!

Luke was crushed when a suspension ruled him out of last year's grand final. He tells *RLW* he would rather concentrate on the present than dwell on the past, but does provide an insight into the process he went through as a means of explaining how it changed him.

"At the time . . . I don't really want to talk too much about it, but, yeah –

look, I was given the right tools to be able to get myself through it," Luke says. "I had the right people around me. I was all right after that. My focus was purely on the boys preparing themselves for the grand final."

Souths insiders say those "right tools" were the club's coaching staff, led by Michael Maguire. Souths don't employ an army of psychologists. They do have access to that sort of expertise if necessary, but Maguire and assistant coaches Wayne Collins and Kurt Wrigley largely trust themselves to help players deal with issues.

Luke and Maguire have a close relationship and it was the coach who encouraged him to make sure grand final week was still a positive experience for him. Luke did that by concentrating on the job of making sure his inexperienced replacement, Api Koroisau, was ready for the game of his life. Luke says not being on

the field didn't make him feel any less of a winner.

"No, it didn't, because I was in Api – my head was in Api's head," he says. "I was always hammering him about this and that and he went out and played sensational. I still went up and shook everyone's hand at the presentation after the game."

"When something like that happens and you miss a grand final, it makes you stronger."

Luke says what he does in 2015 is neither look back nor look forward, but concentrate purely on the now. It's the approach Maguire always wanted him to take. When Luke gained a release from the remainder of his contract with Souths and signed for the Warriors for 2016, he knew that if the rest of his term with the Rabbitohs was to be successful he had to forget about next year.

"If you don't, then you start to drift and worry about things that you can't

control right now," he says.

"I'm not going to lie, I did think about it, but now I'm just focused on Souths. Making a decision on my future allowed me to settle down as a person. All I do is prepare well to play 80 minutes every week. That's what I've got to concentrate on. Winning a grand final would be awesome. You dream of those weekends as a kid and my hunger hasn't changed from when I was a little boy."

Maguire says Luke's grand final-week experience has sharpened the player's focus.

"He's grown up a lot as a result of what happened," Maguire says.

"He's turned something that was a big learning experience for him into bettering himself as a person. He's learned from that and realises the opportunities he has and is seeking to make the most of those with his mates here at Souths. He recognises the opportunity he has right now." **RLW**

IF IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR JT, IT'S GOOD ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE!

Headgear shouldn't just be optional for players – it should be compulsory **BY TONY ADAMS**

A HEALTH AND SAFETY EXPERT HAS demanded that all NRL players be forced to wear headgear to stop the spate of serious head and neck injuries in the game.

Dennis O'Sullivan, who has worked in the building industry for more than 20 years, has contacted the NRL in a bid to reduce the number of concussions and other serious injuries.

"It's a health and safety issue – plain and simple," O'Sullivan explains.

"In the building industry, we take it very seriously because it can cost lives. WorkCover NSW spells out very clearly that employers have to do all they can to protect their employees and the duty of care they have.

"And the same applies to rugby league – just look at what happened to poor Alex McKinnon last year and the deaths we have seen in junior league.

"I'm not saying headgear would have definitely prevented any of this, but it may have lessened the chance of serious injury and that is what health and safety rules are all about."

O'Sullivan says NRL clubs need to think more about player safety – for their own good as well as their players' welfare.

"They employ the players and send them out there to do what is, in effect, a very dangerous job," O'Sullivan says.

"Players are getting knocked out and concussed every week but the NRL and clubs aren't doing anything to try to lessen the number of accidents.

"These players are getting bigger, stronger and faster and hitting harder – it's only going to get worse.

"It will get to the stage where a player will get seriously injured and then take legal action against the NRL.



"At the moment, safety equipment is just up to the individual player.

"Some guys like Johnathan Thurston wear headgear and I believe every player in the game should be made to do it.

"I had apprentices work for me who have said 'I don't want to wear helmets or safety goggles' on the job.

"Then I have had to say to them, 'Sorry, you can't work then'.

"Their safety is my responsibility and I have to take it seriously . . . I don't think the NRL is."

O'Sullivan believes more youngsters may take up rugby league if headgear was made compulsory.

"I played in the front row in the 1970s – there was no headgear then and I took a battering," he says.

"I have three sons and frankly, I'm not keen on them playing football.

"But if players thought it was safer out there, more mums and dads would be willing to let kids play."

O'Sullivan is still awaiting a response from the NRL. **RLW**

FOOTNOTE: In 1986, then-Penrith coach Tim Sheens sent his entire team onto the field for a trial game wearing headgear in a bid to lessen head injuries . . . but it was a one-off and the move never caught on.

DON'T GET AHEAD OF YOURSELVES, BOYS!

THE WARRIORS HELD THEIR ANNUAL old boys' reunion last weekend . . . and not surprisingly it was the club's new recruits that dominated discussion.

But the consensus is the club can't afford to wait for the arrival of star 2016 signings Roger Tuivasa-Sheck and Issac Luke to launch a shot at a maiden NRL title.

They must do it now . . . and they have the cattle to do it.

Last week, *RLW* analysed each team's recruitment for 2016 and ranked the Warriors No.1. But club greats say they will miss an opportunity in front of them if they look too far ahead.

Former Warriors winger Justin Murphy played in the club's first grand final appearance in 2002, and insists this current group can go one step further than his side did.

He says coach Andrew McFadden will have the team mentally ready to improve over the final six rounds – a period where they've been poor in the past three years since last making the finals in 2011.

The Warriors were eighth after round 18 in 2012 but lost their last eight games to limp home in 14th spot. In 2013 the club finished 11th after losing four of their last six, and last year they won only three of their final eight to miss out on for-and-against.

"Issac and Roger are going to add a lot next season but they will want to be coming to a team that finishes this year on a high," Murphy says. "I know Andrew McFadden very well and he's a very smart person who is focused on what they can do now. He's not waiting for next year.

"A lot of the Australian media have spoken about how the Warriors go well through Origin, but then don't perform in the later rounds. This is McFadden's second year with them and he will have driven into them mentally that they have to improve in the next six weeks and have them determined to finish on a high."

Murphy insists the building blocks for launching a shot at a top-four finish are in place. "I know this is a team that can do the job this year, and then add to it next year."

JOEL GOULD

SEMI'S NO.1!

The numbers confirm what we've seen all year – there's no stopping runaway Radradra **BY GREG PRICHARD**

PARRAMATTA HAVE PIONEERED a new style of play this year – 'Semi-ball'.

It's pretty simple, really. Just like the Under-8s – when everyone lobs the ball to the biggest, fastest kid on the team and waits for him to do something – that's what the Eels do with their Fijian winger Semi Radradra.

And why not? After all, it's a style of play that worked pretty well for the Blue-and-Golds in their glory era. Parramatta legend Peter Sterling says the way the Eels seek out Radradra to do something special is the same as what the champion Parramatta teams of the 1980s did with Eric Grothe.

"They would be crazy not to," says 'Sterlo', who isn't surprised Radradra rates a clear No.1 in the latest Contributor Value Rating (CVR) figures, which are regarded as league's version of Major League Baseball's 'Moneyball'.

"Semi has improved enormously during his relatively short time in the game and I think the biggest improvement with him – and a very important part of his game – has been to do with bringing the ball back off his own line," Sterling says. "When they're in trouble he gets in there and helps out and takes those tough metres. He reads things much better in defence now, as well. He used to get a bit lost as to whether to come in or stay out. He's always had the ability to score tries, we all know that, but it's in the other important areas that I think he has really improved."

It appears now that even when it may not be the obvious way to go, Parramatta look to go to Radradra. Asked if he sees that when he watches the Eels, Sterling replies: "Oh yeah, absolutely. I feel a bit sorry for Semi, because I know in my days, playing alongside Eric Grothe, if someone made a break against us we'd all turn around and look at Eric to run him down. And if we needed something special we all turned and looked at Eric. If we needed a try we'd get the ball to Eric. There's a bit of pressure in that, but Semi doesn't seem to be affected. He doesn't seem too tense."

The CVRs, produced by Sportsdata, are the best statistical analysis available to gauge a player's impact on and input to a game. A number of NRL coaches refer to them to track their players' progress.

Another high-impact player, Sam Burgess, was the highest-ranked player in 2014. Cronulla prop Andrew Fifita, Manly

halfback Daly Cherry-Evans, Penrith hooker James Segeyaro and North Queensland fullback Lachlan Coote round out the top five of the top CVR averages per game in 2015. That all makes sense to Sterling as well.

"Andrew Fifita is a bit of a freak. The only thing about him is he's got a bit of a mistake in his game and he gets a bit personal out on the field at times, which doesn't help him, but what he can do with a football and the size of the man and his ability to beat players and get balls away makes him a bit of a standout," he says.

"And if you ask Johnathan Thurston who takes pressure off him most, he's got Lachlan Coote at the top of that list. I think he's the best fullback in the competition when it comes to positional play. Very rarely does the ball (from opposition kicks) get to bounce when he's around."

"We've seen how Penrith have gone without Segeyaro while he's been out injured. He's a very creative player and also a damaging runner. Cherry-Evans has had a disrupted season, but on his day he's right up there with the top No.7s. Each of these players is a bit different to most players who play in their positions, which is why they rate so highly, I think."

THE TOP 25

1. SEMI RADRADRA (Eels)	507.01
2. Andrew Fifita (Sharks)	465.70
3. Daly Cherry-Evans (Sea Eagles)	458.97
4. James Segeyaro (Panthers)	458.44
5. Lachlan Coote (Cowboys)	447.39
6. Aaron Woods (Tigers)	440.40
7. Simon Mannering (Warriors)	440.00
8. James Tedesco (Tigers)	437.88
9. Ben Hunt (Broncos)	437.37
10. Corey Parker (Broncos)	435.35
11. Andrew McCullough (Broncos)	435.19
12. Aiden Tolman (Bulldogs)	427.81
13. Johnathan Thurston (Cowboys)	426.64
14. Kade Snowden (Knights)	425.06
15. Roger Tuivasa-Sheck (Roosters)	424.67
16. Shaun Johnson (Warriors)	419.30
17. Mike Cooper (Dragons)	417.16
18. Jesse Bromwich (Storm)	415.63
19. Robbie Farah (Tigers)	413.30
20. Trent Merrin (Dragons)	412.31
21. George Burgess (Rabbitohs)	410.67
22. Gavin Cooper (Cowboys)	407.78
23. Tyson Frizell (Dragons)	407.21
24. Josh Dugan (Dragons)	405.25
25. Michael Morgan (Cowboys)	404.03





BY THE NUMBERS: THE TOP PLAYERS IN EACH POSITION (Minimum of nine matches)

FULLBACK

1. LACHLAN COOTE (Cowboys)	447.39
2. James Tedesco (Tigers)	437.88
3. Roger Tuivasa-Sheck (Roosters)	424.67
4. Josh Dugan (Dragons)	405.25
5. Matt Moylan (Panthers)	377.89

WINGER

1. SEMI RADRADRA (Eels)	507.01
2. Manu Vatuvei (Warriors)	382.38
3. Shaun Kenny-Dowall (Roosters)	369.57
4. Marika Koroibete (Storm)	339.53
5. Curtis Rona (Bulldogs)	335.02
6. Jorge Taufua (Sea Eagles)	333.43
7. Akuila Uate (Knights)	326.41
8. Jason Nightingale (Dragons)	320.84
9. Lachlan Maranta (Broncos)	317.57
10. Pat Richards (Tigers)	273.37

CENTRE

1. DANE GAGAI (Knights)	359.59
2. James Roberts (Titans)	345.11
3. Will Chambers (Storm)	342.64
4. Dylan Walker (Rabbitohs)	340.66
5. Jack Reed (Broncos)	328.26
6. Euan Aitken (Dragons)	322.66
7. Kane Linnett (Cowboys)	322.26
8. Michael Jennings (Roosters)	321.13
9. Josh Morris (Bulldogs)	314.34
10. Justin Hodges (Broncos)	307.24

FIVE-EIGHTH

1. MICHAEL MORGAN (Cowboys)	404.03
2. Blake Austin (Raiders)	379.11
3. Aidan Sezer (Titans)	341.29
4. Gareth Widdop (Dragons)	323.12
5. Matt Mone (Roosters)	320.16

HALFBACK

1. DALY CHERRY-EVANS (Sea Eagles)	458.97
2. Ben Hunt (Broncos)	437.37
3. Johnathan Thurston (Cowboys)	426.64
4. Shaun Johnson (Warriors)	419.30
5. Mitchell Pearce (Roosters)	401.03

PROP

1. ANDREW FIFITA (Sharks)	465.70
2. Aaron Woods (Tigers)	440.40
3. Aiden Tolman (Bulldogs)	427.81
4. Kade Snowden (Knights)	425.06
5. Mike Cooper (Dragons)	417.16
6. Jesse Bromwich (Storm)	415.63
7. George Burgess (Rabbitohs)	410.67
8. Ben Matulino (Warriors)	403.46
9. Matt Scott (Cowboys)	383.99
10. Josh McGuire (Broncos)	382.64

HOOKE

1. JAMES SEGEYARO (Panthers)	458.44
2. Andrew McCullough (Broncos)	435.19
3. Robbie Farah (Tigers)	413.30
4. Cameron Smith (Storm)	394.77
5. Jake Friend (Roosters)	375.29

SECOND-ROWER

1. TRENT MERRIN (Dragons)	412.31
2. Gavin Cooper (Cowboys)	407.78
3. Tyson Frizell (Dragons)	407.21
4. Wade Graham (Sharks)	401.23
5. Iosia Soliola (Raiders)	397.99
6. Matt Gillett (Broncos)	396.76
7. Tohu Harris (Storm)	393.21
8. Jack de Belin (Dragons)	379.71
9. Josh Jackson (Bulldogs)	377.64
10. Alex Glenn (Broncos)	370.74

LOCK

1. SIMON MANNERING (Warriors)	440.00
2. Corey Parker (Broncos)	435.35
3. Shaun Fensom (Raiders)	396.81
4. Trent Merrin (Dragons)	383.41
5. Martin Taupau (Tigers)	356.20

CVM - CVR per minute played

(Average minutes in brackets - minimum 40 minutes per game)

1. TIM MANNAH (41.9)	8.84
2. Andrew Fifita (53.0)	8.79
3. George Burgess (51.4)	8.00
4. David Klemmer (40.3)	7.99
5. Kade Snowden (55.1)	7.71
6. Thomas Burgess (44.9)	7.70
7. Mike Cooper (54.6)	7.64
8. Josh McGuire (50.7)	7.55
9. Paul Vaughan (42.6)	7.44
10. Jeremy Latimore (44.1)	7.43

* All CVRs do not include Cowboys-Eels Rd 20 match



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BEAU KNOWS... SUPERHEROES

Footy's favourite funnyman takes an off-beat look at the big issues in the game

WONDER WOMAN, THE JOKER AND... AND CHUCK NORRIS

If our game's biggest superstars were superheroes, this is who they'd be

WITH THE MARVEL Superhero round here again, we'll see seven clubs trotting out in some pretty funky gear this weekend.

From the green Hulk jersey to Captain America, they are pretty cool.

And they got me thinking, if NRL stars were to have super powers, what would they be? Let's take a look...

Lachlan Coote would be able to perform wizardry. He could turn players into stone. Not because he's crafty, but because he's a dead ringer for Harry Potter. Still a great player, though!

While we're on the Cowboys, gigantic back-rower **Jason Taumalolo** would have to be the closest a human can get to The Hulk. He looks like a Kiwi version of Arnold Schwarzenegger! Reports out of Townsville are that Taumalolo is the strongest man in Queensland. Even stronger than Mal Meninga... but please don't tell Mal I said that.

Kevin Gordon looks like Wonder Woman. He has long black hair, is fit and has a big chest. I would rather bump into Wonder Woman in a dark alley than Kevin Gordon, though!

Mitch Moses would have powers that are biblical. He could wear a robe similar to ones worn thousands of years ago by shepherds and his power would be to part the sea.

Imagine being able to move water. He could really help the Raiders' recruitment staff – every time a player said he didn't want to live in Canberra he could just raise the water levels and turn the nation's capital into an island. Then watch people flock there and house prices become more expensive than Balmoral.

Cameron Smith would be able to see through walls. He can see through pretty much everything now, anyway... he can certainly see through opposition game plans.

David 'Wolfman' Williams would have to be Wolverine... but no one has seen Williams for 12 months, so I guess I'll have to pick someone else.

Dave Taylor is pretty hairy. But he looks more like a cross between Wolverine and Hellboy. Maybe if Wolverine and Hellboy had a baby you would have yourself a Dave Taylor.



I know Chuck Norris isn't really a superhero... but if **Nate Myles** was a superhero, he would be Chuck Norris. No-one's tougher than Chuck Norris (except for Mick Fanning!) and no NRL player is tougher than Nate Myles. He's so tough, he puts gravel on his slip and slide. Nate loves pain so much and he also loves inflicting it on others on the footy field. He's a bloke I hated playing. His head is harder than asphalt.

Spider-Man would have to be **Greg Inglis**. Not because he spins webs, but because he plays like he's covered in deadly spiders. No-one can tackle him. Most of the time, players don't want to go near him. He is the best in the business at the moment and that lethal fend of his shoots out quicker than Spidey's web.

Steve Matai is Batman. He gets bashed around, injured and nearly dies every tackle but he keeps coming back. You can't stop him.

He's also a champion in

ERHEROES



Beau Ryan (Cronulla Sharks and Channel Nine Footy Show)

she is the president, then she's the postman. Similar to **Roger Tuivasa-Sheck** (even though Roger is a guy). He can play fullback, wing, five-eighth . . . he could even be the whole front row if needed. He's basically the president when he gets the ball because he calls the shots and we all know he's the postman, as he always delivers!

Former player **Brett Finch** even gets a start here . . . as Catwoman. Not because he's a cat and not because he has nine lives, but because he had nine clubs.

Finally, Thor from the Fantastic Four is definitely **Jack de Belin** from St George Illawarra. The guys have so much in common. They are big, blond and both have a big hammer. They are very handsome and can save the day. I think the Dragons need more than Thor to save them at the moment, though! But they will bounce back. They always do.

So there you go. There are my superheroes of the NRL! **RLW**

dishing out his own punishment – blindsiding opponents and lining up back-rowers and flattening them every time they run at him. Hits them like thieves in the night. In the alleyways. Batman Matai. It has a nice ring to it.

Jared Waerea-Hargreaves would be The Joker. He's feared and loves playing the villain. And he's always smiling . . . even when he's knocking out your teeth or ripping off half your face. He's a great guy, though . . . I just hope he doesn't read this and try to do either of those things to me. I have a feeling no-one would be able to protect me. Not even The Rock.

Michael Ennis is Superman. He travels to different clubs at the speed of light, leaps away from fights in a single bound and he's invincible. But he hates Kryptonite. Robbie Farah is holding the Kryptonite. Hang in there, Mick. Team Ennis!

Mystique from the X-Men changes form. She adapts to anything and can really confuse you. One second



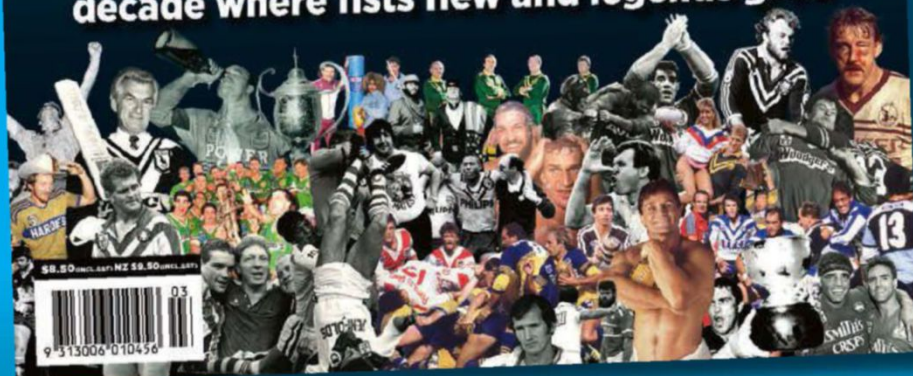
Want to win your club's Marvel Superhero jersey? Thanks to our friends at What's Your Team, we have one to give away. To enter, simply tell us in 25 words or less why your favourite NRL player is like a superhero. Send your entries to RLW Superhero jersey comp, PO Box 4088, Sydney, NSW, 2001. Or email us at rlw@bauer-media.com.au Entries close Thursday, August 6. The winner will be announced in our August 10 issue. Good luck!

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LEAGUE IN THE 80s COMING SOON!

FOOTY BEHIND BARS

When ex-Storm star Ben Roarty organised a game of footy between his mates and some inmates from HM Loddon prison, he didn't realise just how much *everyone* would benefit from the experience **BY STEVEN RUSSO**

THERE'S NO POLITE WAY of putting it . . . Graham Byrnes was shitting himself. You would be, too, if you were in his shoes. And it's not hard to see why.

Graham loves rugby league. But the 78kg IT worker is the first to admit he's more Bill Gates than Sonny Bill Williams.

A long-time friend of Melbourne Storm premiership winner Ben Roarty, NSW-expat Byrnes has spent the past few years helping his mate spread the gospel of rugby league in Victoria, mainly as a water boy or a referee – but never as a player.

So when Roarty, a former correctional officer, asked Byrnes whether he wanted to help stage rugby league's answer to American film *The Longest Yard* at Victoria's HM Loddon prison, Byrnes assumed he'd be part of the support staff. Boy, was he wrong!

In the Hollywood flick, a team of prison inmates put together a football team and challenged the prison guards to a game. But in this version, the men from HM Loddon prison played a team of civilians pulled together by Roarty. And Roarty wanted Byrnes in the team!

"I put up my hand to ref or be the water boy, just to help out and be part of it," Byrnes tells *RLW*.

"But then 'Roarts' said, 'Nah, mate, you're playing'. I thought he was joking.

"My first time on a footy field had been during a Masters game.

"I just kept telling him, 'I haven't

got muscles, tattoos or a tan . . . I can't play rugby league!'

"I was scared, mate!"

And with good reason! Only three days earlier, Victoria had experienced its worst-ever prison riot, when 300 prisoners caused a reported \$10 million worth of damage at Melbourne's Metropolitan Remand Centre.

With the Victorian government having just banned all prisoners from smoking, tensions across the state's 12 jails were high. But an undeterred Roarty dragged Byrnes and 11 other 'volunteers' on the 90-minute journey from Melbourne to the medium security prison.

"That was the calm before the storm," Byrnes says of the bus trip.

"A couple of boys were listening to music; I was just sitting there thinking about it. I wanted to go in low key, one bloke in a big group.

"I thought I'd keep my eyes down and my mouth shut."

After surrendering everything but their drivers' licences and clothes at the door, the visitors were greeted by what appeared to be a humble multi-purpose sports ground. But with around 150 detainees watching on from elevated terraces, Byrnes felt like a Christian martyr set to face the lions in the Colosseum.

"There were big gates, big heavy metal, cameras . . . it felt pretty heavy," he says. "There were all these blokes lined up on almost all four sides of the field. Most of them (the opposition players) were big, and the ones that didn't have size on them certainly had the right



physique. Plus, they were actually practising, doing proper kicking and passing drills. That sort of drilled home that we weren't just going to throw the ball around."

There was a bit of tension early on. The visitors had a couple a correctional officers in their squad and before kick-off both teams eyed each other suspiciously from opposite ends of the field.

But Roarty, the self-appointed referee, broke the ice with his unique brand of diplomacy.

"When we first got there, we had a bit of a Mexican stand-off," Roarty says. "But I stood in the middle, blew the whistle and said, 'Righto,

get in there and hug each other. Make yourself friends or it's not going to happen'.

"Everyone sort of looked at each other, walked over, shook hands and hugged each other, and the initial barrier was broken down. It was really was a touching moment."

For Byrnes, the warm-and-fuzzy moment was broken when he realised the ground was as hard as his opponents.

"The Masters games that I had played had been on lush green fields up on the Gold Coast," he says.

"When we walked on the ground at Loddon there was gravel.

"I just kept thinking, 'Geez,



THE LONGEST YARD

When Ben Roarty (fourth from left) led a team into HM Loddon prison to play against a bunch of inmates, his mate Graham Byrnes (centre, in Tigers socks) was rather apprehensive.

I don't know if I want to play on this'."

Hard? It made the cricket pitch on North Sydney Oval feel like a jumping castle.

"It had a section in the middle which was like an ice-skating rink, hard as rock," Roarty adds. "We had to make a general rule not to tackle too hard on that spot."

But the surface wasn't the only occupational hazard the players had to contend with. One player was driven head-first into a wire fence in a crunching three-man tackle!

But that was the extent of the danger. Super-ref Roarty says, despite the prisoners' chequered backgrounds, the game was played in the right spirit. That's not to say it wasn't a hard game, though!

"There were no blow-ups but there were definitely a couple of big shots," Roarty says. "Controlled aggression, that's what rugby league's about. You're allowed to belt the shit out of the next person and get away with it... it was really good to watch. I've got a bit of a rapport with the prisoners and

I knew my mates. If anything got out of hand, I knew I could just blow the whistle and attract the attention of other officers in the area."

In the end, it was the visitors who emerged victorious, 32-28. But man-of-the-match honours went to a young detainee dubbed 'GI'.

"He turned the game upside down with attacking flair and his willingness to do the hard yards," Roarty says. "I think he scored four of their five tries and set up one more. For him it was probably his 15 minutes of fame... he and his mates loved it."

After Roarty blew the final whistle, the combatants came together in a communal room for a BBQ lunch. Byrnes found it to be a very humanising experience.

"If you were just sitting with them having a beer in the pub, you wouldn't know (they were prisoners)... they were just normal blokes," he says. "They said it was great to be part of a team and have a release from tough times, like not being able to see their families. For us, we

"When Ben told me I was playing, I thought he was joking. I kept telling him, 'I haven't got muscles, tattoos or a tan... I can't play rugby league!' I was scared"

have jobs that we don't like and get pulled away from our families, too. So everything they were saying rung true with me."

As always the final word lay with Roarty, who after the meal explained to the prisoners how the whole experience had been an exercise in goal-setting and how it could play a vital role in their rehabilitation.

He even indicated the game could become a regular occurrence.

"I told them, 'This is a great opportunity for you guys who have never learned how to set goals to grab the guy beside you and go to the gym, do weights and get running in preparation for the next game'," Roarty says. "They were all fairly adamant that they were going to come back bigger and stronger for the next game, which I'm aiming to hold in September or October. Former NRL referee Tony De Las Heras has even offered to referee at some stage."

Graham Byrnes will be back, too. He'll probably be a bit nervous before the game again, but he won't be scared. **RLW**



'My family's perfect and my footy's jumping to another level'

Andrew Fifita has had a lot on his mind lately . . . and it's made concentrating on footy very difficult

BY STEVEN RUSSO

WHEN YOU'RE 194CM and 116kg, it takes a lot to stop you in your tracks. But Sharks prop Andrew Fifita has no shame in admitting he has recently been floored by a little girl.

Not just any little girl, though, *his* little girl.

Fifita says the long wait for his second child, Lyla Jade, was a key reason behind the dip in form which cost the former Test prop his spot in the Blues side following NSW's

narrow loss in Origin One. However, with Lyla having finally arrived seven weeks ago, Fifita is free to return to his blockbusting best. It's come just in the nick of time, too, with the Sharks desperately needing a strong run home to break into the top eight.

"I've got nothing on my back, I can see clearly now – there are no longer any stresses," Fifita tells *RLW*.

"My family's perfect and my footy's jumping to another level.

"I'm playing some happy football and it's really coming along at the right time of the year."

Lyla was originally due on May 27, the date of Origin One, and even though Andrew was prepared to miss the birth to play in the series opener, he admits it was a distraction out on the field.

"My missus was overdue after that first Origin period and it was really playing on my mind, whether

she was going to pop when I was on the training paddock or when I was on the field, even in Origin," Fifita says,

"It was taking away from my footy a bit, once (wife) Nikki started hitting crunch time things went a bit 'how you going.'

"At the end of the day she (Lyla) has arrived and she's very beautiful and I'm really enjoying my footy now that she's here. It's stress-free."

It hasn't been all smooth sailing for little Lyla, with some nasty coughing fits causing concern throughout the Fifita family. But Andrew is confident his young one is on the road to recovery.

"It was a little bit of a scare," Fifita says.

"The last few weeks we've been in and out of hospital with her, but she's been doing really well.

"It's all good, she sleeps through the night now." *RLW*

NORMAN'S NEW CHALLENGE

JARRYD HAYNE'S GONE TO

NFL, Chris Sandow's gone to Warrington and Parra's season looks to have gone off the rails. But Corey Norman's game has gone to another level in 2015 . . . and there's more to come once he returns from injury.

The Eels are sweating on his return from a knee injury sustained against the Dogs in round 19. And coach Brad Arthur has issued him a further challenge when he comes back.

"I've had a pretty good season and feel I have really grown and matured as a player," Norman says. "But you always want to keep improving and Brad has sat me down and said I really need to go up another peg and take the team further. It's vital to go hard and finish well. It's a challenge but I'm happy to give it a shot.

"I like having the responsibility of steering the team around the park and talk has always been a part of my game.

"I do a lot of chatting out there anyway and the extra responsibility is something I enjoy – I don't see it as a burden."

Norman, 24, is in his second year with the Eels and, after finding his feet last season, has proved one of the game's most astute playmakers in 2015.

When Norman went down with a knee injury against the Bulldogs a fortnight ago, there were fears he would miss the rest of the year.

But the Eels received some much-needed good news last week, with scans clearing him for a return in a few weeks.

TONY ADAMS



GIDS MOVES ON FOR THE KIDS



Kurt Gidley has always put his Knights before himself... and that was case again when he decided to leave for the UK **BY TONY ADAMS**

KURT GIDLEY HAS OPENED up about his heart-wrenching decision to leave the Knights, declaring he felt he would be holding the club's boom youngsters back if he stayed at the club.

After 15 seasons and close to 250 games, Gidley made the tough call in May to finish his career at Warrington in England.

At 33, Gidley seemed certain to end his days as a one-club man – one of the Knights' best ever – before making the shock announcement he was leaving for the UK.

"Deep down, I have known for some time that this would be my last year for the club," the star utility tells *RLW*.

"It was the final year of my contract but I wanted to play on, but not

stand in the way of these younger guys.

"I didn't want to take up an extra position in the club going forward. I feel the club is in good hands and I'm more than happy to move on, to let the young guys take their chances now."

Gidley admits it still wasn't an easy decision to walk away from the club where he debuted as a raw teenager in 2001.

"It was one of the hardest things I've had to do and it's sinking in now that the end is near," he says.

"Telling my brother (club chief executive Matt Gidley) and my teammates was tough but now the decision has been made, there's a bit of a sense of relief."

But Gidley isn't about to get nostalgic and knows the Knights need

to pick up their act on the field for him to leave on the right note.

"It will all become more of a reality closer to our last home game – at the moment we need to work harder on our game and try to improve our performances," he says.

Only two players – club legends Danny Buderus (257) and Andrew Johns (249) – have played more games than 245-game veteran Gidley.

"I've been a Newcastle boy all my life and been fortunate I've been able to play all my footy here.

"I've never had to move out and there's no doubt I will miss the place – it's been good to me."

Gidley will move to England in November with wife Brooke and daughters, Arabella and Macy. **RLW**

THIS ONE'S FOR YOU, FRANCIS

BEFORE EVERY MATCH, ALEX GLENN

and Anthony Milford take a quiet moment to think about their departed mate, Francis Winterstein.

Both the Broncos stars have been writing Francis' initials on their wrist strapping before every match this year, with Kiwi Test star Glenn telling *RLW* the pair are dedicating their 2015 season to him.

Francis, the younger brother of Cowboys winger Antonio, tragically took his own life back in February, aged only 19. Glenn came through the Broncos' ranks with Antonio and was also close to Francis.

"Antonio and I are best mates and I got along really well with all his family," Glenn tells *RLW*. "When Antonio was at Brisbane we hung out a lot and I was often hanging out at his house, and we did a lot with Francis.

"Even though he's up in heaven, I know he's looking down and I play every game for him. I've dedicated this season to him... I write the initials 'FW' on my right-wrist tape every game – that's for Francis."

More than four months after the tragedy, Glenn says he's still at a loss to explain why Francis took his own life. He says the last couple of times he caught up with the

Townsville Stingers representative, he was in good spirits.

"He was just so young," Glenn continues.

"With him being up in Townsville, I didn't get to see him too much, but every time I was up there he was so happy and it was always great to catch up. After that tragedy, we were all left with unanswered questions, trying to figure out why it all happened.

"I guess he's in a better place."

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STEVEN RUSSO

THEY'LL BE SORRY, LAURIE!

Leichhardt Oval might be on borrowed time as an NRL venue . . . but it will remain in Tigers fans' hearts forever

BY STEVEN RUSSO

WHAT WOULD THE LATE, great Laurie Nichols say if he was here today? The Wests Tigers board is yet to commit to keeping Leichhardt Oval as a home base, meaning the clash against Melbourne on Friday may be the last time the black, white and golds grace the beloved suburban ground. So *RLW* is taking a stroll down memory lane to re-visit some of the more remarkable games from the historic ground's 81-year history.

ROUND 24, 1999

BALMAIN 20 d PARRAMATTA 10

'Could God be a Balmain supporter?' queried *RLW*'s Jim

Marr after this famous game. Considering the sheer number of miracles that occurred the evening Balmain played at home for the last time as a stand-alone entity, it's not entirely out of the question. It was a miracle that 15,230 people braved the cyclonic conditions, it was a miracle that the 14th-placed Tigers managed to overcome the table-topping Eels, and it was definitely a miracle that none of the players developed hypothermia – although Balmain skipper Darren Senter reportedly came close.

ROUND 20, 2005

WESTS TIGERS 42 d SOUTH SYDNEY 20

With an old enemy in town, and

the Tigers in the midst of an eight-game winning streak, this was always going to be a well-attended game – but even the most ardent Tigers fan would have been surprised by the sheer number of punters that showed up. With a record 22,877 people crammed in, officials were forced to close the gates 20 minutes before kick-off – but that didn't stop hoordes of people from scaling trees and houses to get a piece of the action.

ROUND 1, 1997

MANLY 14 d BALMAIN 10

A bumper crowd of 18,247 rocked up to Leichhardt on a balmy March evening as Balmain returned to their spiritual home for the first time since 1994. The Tigers didn't win but they sure gave the defending premiers an almighty scare. Attendances plummeted during the Super League war, but not at Leichhardt Oval, where average attendances surged past the 10,000 mark in 1997 and '98. Much better than what the Sydney Tigers drew playing their 'home' games at Parramatta Stadium in 1995 and '96.

ROUND 9, 1960

BALMAIN 19 d ST GEORGE 15

Keith Barnes certainly lived up to his 'Golden Boots' nickname on this afternoon, with his masterful goal-kicking sinking a champion St George team at Leichhardt Oval. In the middle of their incredible run of 11 straight premierships, the Saints were riding on a streak of six victories on the trot. But Barnes managed to clinch the win for the Tigers with five goals . . . including a penalty shot taken nine metres his own side of halfway!



ROUND 22, 1989

BALMAIN 33 d PENRITH 6

RLW's Tony Megahey described it as 'rugby league war'. Both teams were finals bound and referee Bill Harrigan was kept busy in a game marred by a send-off, multiple sin-binnings and even a biting allegation. Throw in a crowd of 22,750 people and you had an instant classic. John Cartwright (*below*) received his marching orders in the 21st minute for a late shot on Tigers hooker Benny Elias, who also found himself in strife when Panthers firebrand Mark Geyer accused him of biting. With Cartwright off the field, the Tigers dominated the second half to secure third place on the premiership ladder.

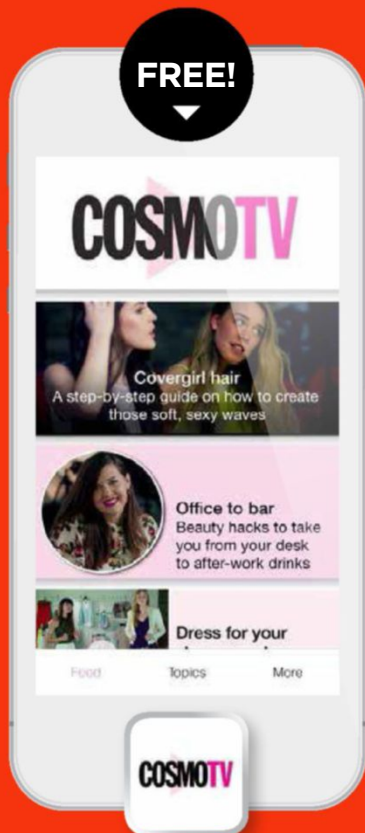


ROUND 21, 1990

PARRAMATTA 14 d BALMAIN 10

Tears and crepe paper were the order of the day when Balmain champion Wayne Pearce played at Leichhardt for the last time. Black-and-gold streamers rained down from all corners of the ground as Junior defied his dodgy knees, and a shock loss to Parramatta, to perform one last lap of honour. "I'd like to thank each and every one of you who turned up today," an emotional Pearce told the 14,943 people in attendance. "Whether you're supporting Balmain or Parramatta, it's made an absolutely fantastic atmosphere."

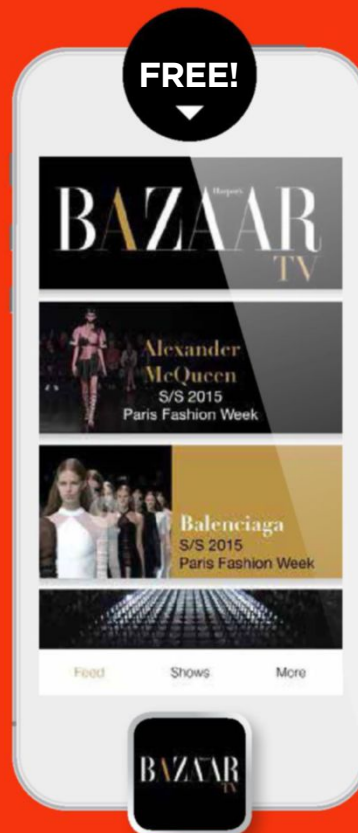




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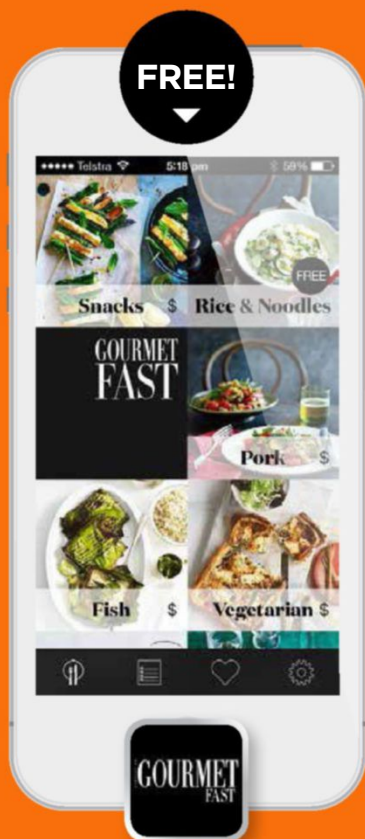
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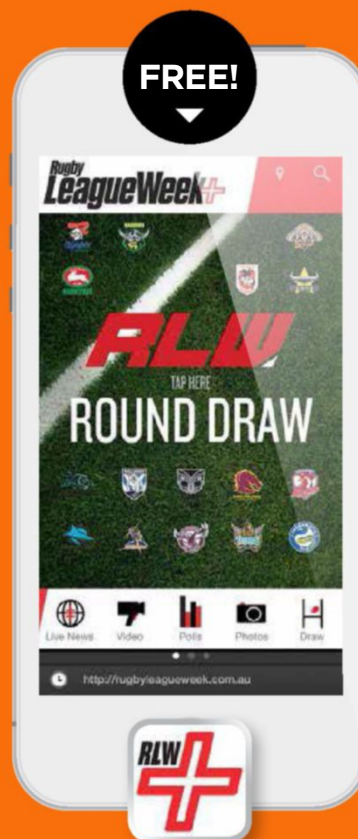
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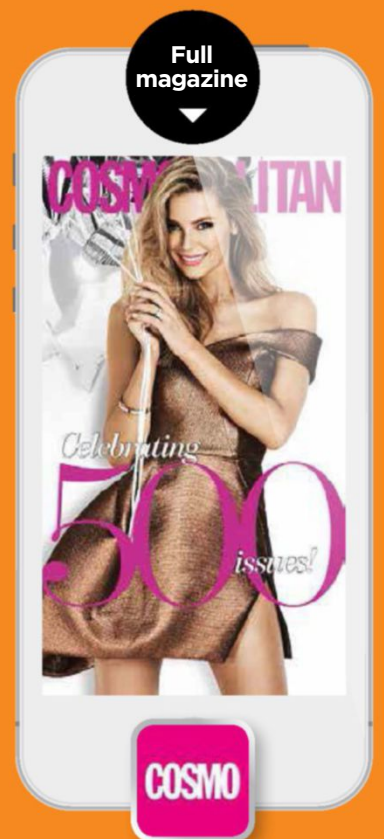
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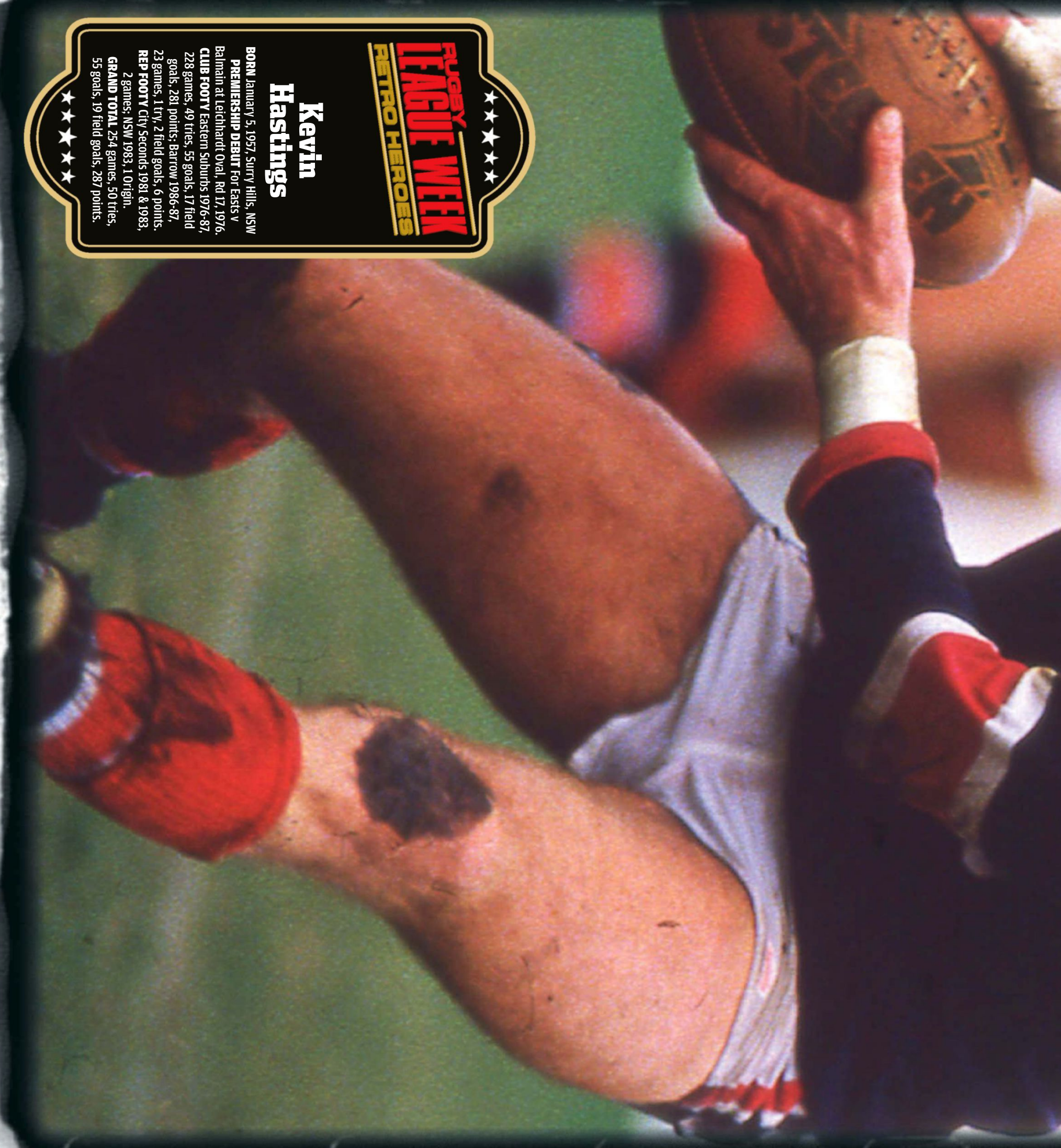
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★★★★★
RUGBY
LEAGUE WEEK
RETRO HEROES

**Kevin
Hastings**

BORN January 5, 1957, Surry Hills, NSW
PREMIERSHIP DEBUT For Easts v
Balmain at Leichhardt Oval, Rd 17, 1976.
CLUB FOOTY Eastern Suburbs 1976-87,
228 games, 49 tries, 55 goals, 17 field
goals, 281 points; Barrow 1986-87,
23 games, 1 try, 2 field goals, 6 points.
REP FOOTY City Seconds 1981 & 1983,
2 games; NSW 1983, 1 Origin.
GRAND TOTAL 254 games, 50 tries,
55 goals, 19 field goals, 287 points.

★★★★★







Rugby League Week



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BASKETBALL SINGLET



CORE SHORTS



POLYESTER CAP

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SYDNEY ROOSTERS 2015 SQUAD

BACK ROW (L-R): Patrick Lane (assistant strength and conditioning coach), Martin Kennedy, Abraham Papalii, Blake Ferguson, Dylan Napa, Nene Macdonald, Willis Meehan, Daniel Tupou, Kane Evans, Pierre Austury (sports science coordinator).

THIRD ROW (L-R): Dennis Russell (NRL performance analyst), Jack Siejka, Brendan Elliot, Samisoni Langi, Matt McIlwrick, Lagi Setu, Nathan Stapleton, Siosua Taukeiaho, Tyler Cornish, Jackson Hastings, Sam Kennedy (assistant strength and power coach).

SECOND ROW (L-R): Justin Holbrook (NRL assistant coach), Adam Hartigan (football operations manager/NYC head coach), Steph Brennan (head physiotherapist), Adam Bentley (rehabilitation/NYC physiotherapist), Michael Jennings, Willie Manu, Vincent Leuluai, Isaac Liu, Scott Campbell (strength and conditioning coach), Hayden Knowles (speed and agility coach), Louisa Cutler (senior squad physiotherapist), Travis Touma (head of performance).

FRONT ROW (L-R): Craig Fitzgibbon (NRL assistant coach), Mitchell Aubusson, James Maloney, Aidan Guerra, Boyd Cordner (vice-captain), Mitchell Pearce (captain), Trent Robinson (coach), Jake Friend (captain), Jared Waerea-Hargreaves (vice-captain), Shaun Kenny-Dowall, Roger Tuivasa-Sheck, Sam Moa, Steve McNamara (NRL assistant coach).

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MAD MONDAY!

It's a funny old game, rugby league. And *RLW* wants to celebrate all the characters and colour that make it great



MR PERSONALITY: WILLIE MASON

Our game's biggest personality talks bad haircuts, bad raps and good mates **BY GREG PRICHARD**

Willie, 'Big Willie', Wil, 'Wilbur', 'Mase'. How do you prefer to be known these days?

Mase, Wil, Willie – that's about it. There's a couple who call me Wilbur. 'Bedsy' (Danny Buderus) calls me Wilbur – and Danny Weidler does as well. Mase is probably the most recognisable.

The hair. We go all the way back to the famous afro you had at Canterbury, but you've also had the corn-rows and you've got the short haircut now. Have you ever gone the bald look?

Probably a No.1 all over – and I think I turned that into a mohawk one night. Jamaal Lolesi was cutting my hair and trying to do a bit of a fade and the razor slipped and *bang!* It was a zero. I said, "Don't do it zero the whole way", so I ended up with a mohawk for one Friday night game with the Dogs. He fancied himself as a barber, but he was awful (laughs). Then I did have to go bald until it grew back.

You're 35 and still going strong. Do you consider yourself an elder statesman of the game?

I don't know. It's weird. I look at younger kids and how they look at me and obviously I'm an elder statesman, aren't I. The Trbojevic brothers here at Manly – Jake and Tom – if me and 'Killer' (Jamie Lyon) start talking about something that happened in 2004, they were in Year Four or something like that. They're babies, so it sort of hits you then that you are an elder statesman, or an older player, but I don't feel old. I mean, I feel old some mornings, but not when I'm around all the younger players. The older guys are great as well – we've got a good balance here. If I felt old while I was out there playing, if I felt I couldn't compete, I'd retire. But I don't. I still feel like I'm 25. I don't feel bad at all.

Here's one for you – how much of what you were blamed for over the years did you actually do?

None! Depends on what you're talking about. Anything that happened, I got blamed for. Peed in public twice, I did that. Jumped a cab – I did that. Or they said I did that! But I gave the bloke what the trip was worth.

It was a legitimate argument over a fare!

It was. He said it was \$90 from Malabar to Brighton (in 2002) and I knew how much it was. Because we were drunk he said it was \$89 and I said, 'No, it's 40 bucks', so I threw him 40 bucks and got out of the cab and they said I'd jumped the cab. He hadn't put the meter on. Don't try and rob me – I'm not that dumb. There were a few other beat-ups, or things that were over-dramatised. A lot of them were trivial things, but they were made out to be massive.

People appreciate that you haven't cut that link off between you and the public, via the media. Are you aware of that?

Yeah. It wasn't all the media's fault. You're doing your job and I'm not the sort of bloke who holds grudges or anything like that. You guys didn't know if it was true or not, so you're just reporting on your stuff and I'm just arguing my case, really.

You're determined to say what you think. You're honest and interesting, which people like . . .

I don't think what I say is that controversial, but it's my opinion and I like to be honest with what I say. Some people might take offence sometimes, but it depends what sort of person you are and whether you know me or not. If you ask me a question, I'm not going to sit on the fence. I could do that, but if I want to answer it and have my opinion out there I'm going to tell you.

What do you do to switch off from footy?

I love to just hang around with mates. Different people, not just football players. I've got a lot of great footy mates – guys like Reni (Maitua), Sonny (Bill Williams), 'Bobcat' (Andrew Ryan), 'Ogre' (Mark O'Meley) – but most of them are either retired or overseas. That's my sort of gang. Corey Hughes, Brad Morrin – we're all still good mates from the Bulldogs days. We try and catch up. Other than that, I just try to relax . . . just go home and switch off – watch a bit of TV. I just watch the stuff that really interests me – a lot of ESPN and that kind of stuff. I don't watch a lot of local news. I don't really want to know too much about what's going on – ignorance is bliss sometimes. **RLW**

THE 'OTHER SPORT' 13

1. Dick Thornett (water polo)

Amazingly, he represented Australia at three different sports! Played water polo at the 1960 Olympics before winning caps with the Wallabies and Kangaroos.

2. Israel Folau (AFL)

Sure, Folau struggled during his 13-game stint with GWS, but the fact he managed two topline goals is a solid feat.

3. Mark Harris (gridiron)

Trialled with the Philadelphia Eagles NFL side in 1973.

Didn't make the final cut, but managed 14 games with Canada's Montreal Alouettes

4. Manfred Moore (gridiron)

In 1977, the Oakland running-back did a reverse Hayne and was an instant hit at Newtown.

5. Michael Cleary (athletics)

Won bronze for the 100 yard sprint at the 1962 Commonwealth Games.

6. Bronko Djura (cricket)

Was the first-choice wicket keeper during Australia's Under-19s tour of England in 1983, ahead of Ian Healy.

7. Anthony Mundine (boxing)

Was twice crowned the World Boxing Association Super Middleweight Champion.

8. Herb Narvo (boxing)

Won the Australian Heavyweight Championship in what was his 13th pro bout.

9. Andrew Johns (cricket)

OK, we kind of cheated on this one, but Joey did make two guest appearances for NSW in the 2006-07 Twenty20 comp.

10. Jim Armstrong (wrestling)

The former Souths prop won a bronze medal for wrestling at the 1948 Olympics, and also managed gold and silver at the Empire and Commonwealth Games respectively.

11. Graeme Hughes (cricket)

Represented NSW at both league and cricket, playing 17 Sheffield Shield matches between 1975-79.

12. Bob Craig (soccer, swimming)

The former Balmain forward won a stack of national and state swimming titles and excelled at soccer before representing Australia at union and league.

13. Dennis Tutty (rowing)

Former Test forward was part of the NSW eight that won the coveted Kings Cup in 1965.

Coch: Warren Ryan (shot put)

Represented Australia at the 1962 Commonwealth Games.

MAD STUFF ON EBAY!



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THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY

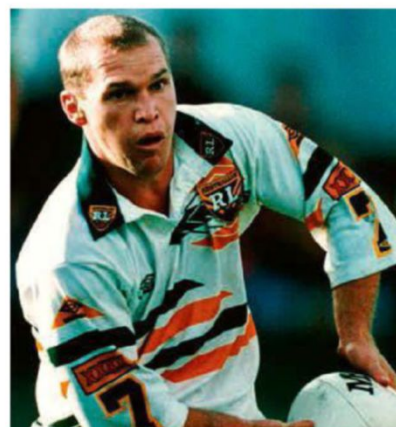
As the NRL gears up for Super Hero round, *Mad Monday* looks at five jerseys that fashion sidestepped

BY STEVEN RUSSO



Parramatta M&Ms jersey (1997)

Parramatta earned their place in the hall of jersey infamy in 1997 when they became the first team to dedicate their entire playing strip to flogging a product. The product in question was blue M&Ms, which had recently been introduced to the Australian market. Like the famed confectionary they were promoting, the Eels melted under pressure against a strong Manly side, going down 18-8.



Australia's away jersey (1992)

To some it may seem sacrilegious to meddle with the Australian jersey – but the ARL did just that in 1992 when they axed the traditional green and gold chevrons for a predominantly white strip. The jersey was never used in a Test match but featured in Australia's three warm-up games during their '92 World Cup tour. It has consequently become somewhat of a holy grail for rugby league hipsters.



NSW Origin jersey (1997)

The NSW hierarchy enraged fans when they decided to replace the traditional sky-blue jersey with this two-toned monstrosity. Even Blues skipper Brad Fittler was filthy, writing in his *RLW* column: "How could the designers and marketers seriously agree this was the best choice? The horizontal stripes look like barcodes. What's the story – will the in-goal touch judge swipe you after you score a try?"



Broncos diamond jersey (1994-95)

Brisbane have had a few interesting jerseys in the past (anyone remember that teal number?), but this one takes the cake in the zany stakes. Still, despite its obscure design, the Broncos fans and players quickly warmed to the jersey. Club legend Darren Lockyer even nominates it as his favourite strip. But *Mad Monday* reckons it looks a like a cross between a table cloth and jockey's silks.



Wests Tigers Skyfall Jersey (2013)

The name's Anasta, Braith Anasta. To mark the DVD release of the James Bond movie *Skyfall* in early 2013, the Tigers decided to ditch their traditional orange jersey in favour of a predominantly black number complete with the iconic James Bond gun barrel. Exactly what 007 has to do with rugby league is still beyond us, but the Tigers definitely fired a few shots that night, beating Parramatta 31-18 at Leichhardt.

SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

Jared Waerea-Hargreaves to Captain America (Chris Evans)



Jared Waerea-Hargreaves

Played alongside Shaun Johnson for New Zealand at the 2013 World Cup.



Shaun Johnson

Was mentored by *RLW* Immortal Andrew Johns early in his NRL career.



Andrew Johns

Partied hard with Silverchair frontman Daniel Johns after the Knights' 1997 grand final win.



Daniel Johns

Silverchair music featured in the film *Looking for Alibrandi*, which starred Anthony La Paglia.



Anthony La Paglia

Lent his voice to the movie *Happy Feet*, alongside Hugo Weaving.



Hugo Weaving

Played Johann Schmidt/Red Skull in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, with Chris Evans.



Chris Evans

Played Steve Rogers/Captain America in the film... but we reckon JWH fits the role better!

LOWE AND BEHOLD

This hard-running Cowboy didn't burst into the NRL like his former NYC buddy Boyd Cordner . . . but he's fast gaining ground **BY JOEL GOULD**

ETHAN LOWE HAS ALWAYS been a persistent bugger . . . even as a little bloke running around in Goondiwindi.

Lowe's father, Stephen, laughs when he recalls the story of five-year-old Ethan wanting to play footy for the Queensland border town, but being too young to play Under-7s.

And that was when his persistence and determination first kicked in.

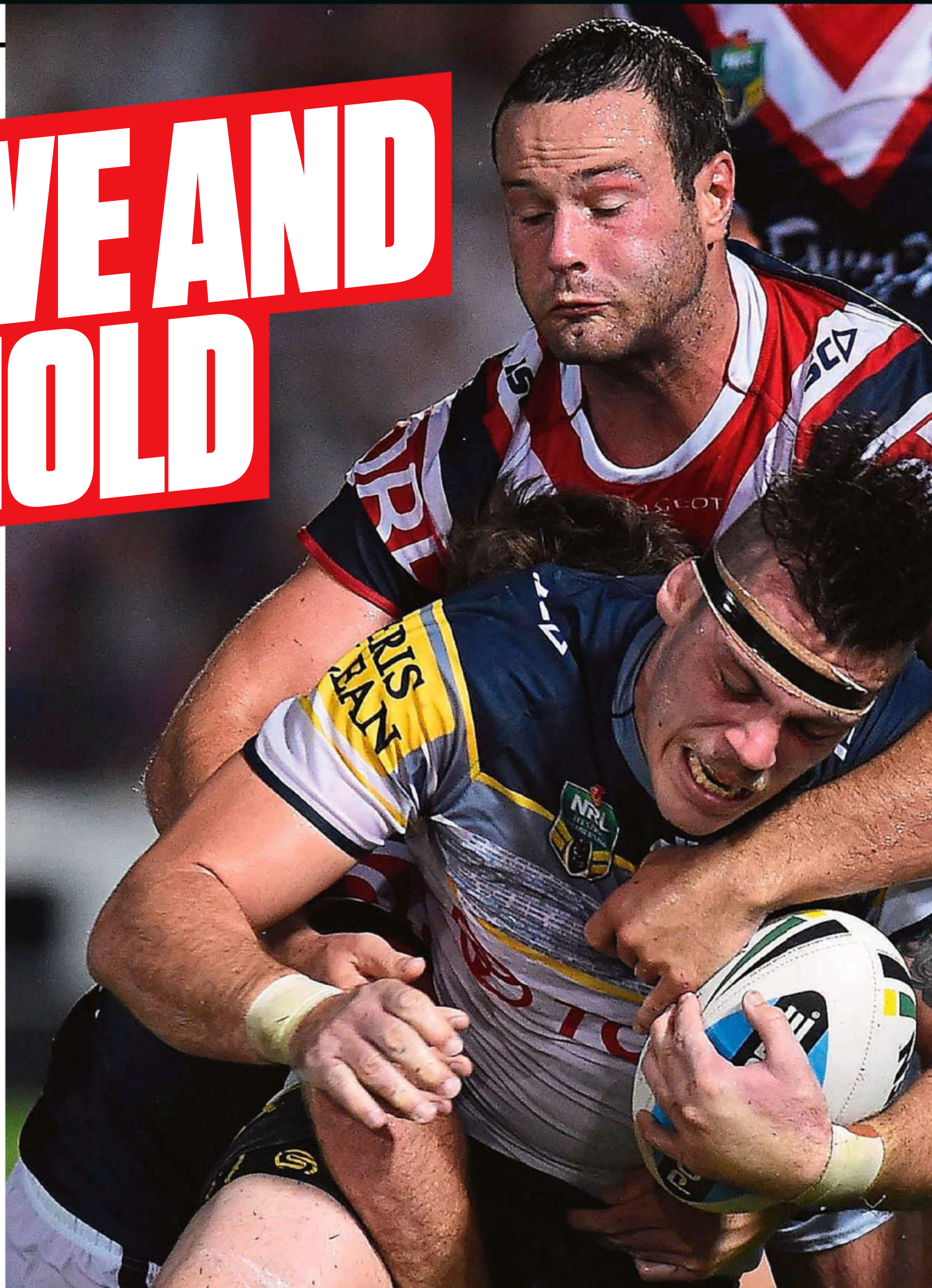
"He pestered me for weeks, so I rang the Under-7s coach to ask if he could just come down and run around," Stephen laughs.

"Ethan went to training, and I got a phone call from my wife to say he was in hospital getting stitches in his eye because he'd been split.

"But once the stitches were out, he was straight back down there again mixing it. That just shows his determination from a young age. Nothing would faze him as a kid."

That determination is a quality that has stayed with him since, helping him move past disappointments that would have convinced others to give up.

In 2008, Lowe was colts player of the year at Valleys in Toowoomba





in a season where his coach, Richie Lee, says he showed courage “beyond belief”.

“Ethan played most of the year with a badly broken bone in his hand, but he’d just tape it up,” Lee says.

“His dedication to the cause is just second to none.

“When he signed with the Roosters I wasn’t allowed to play him in the grand final because he needed an operation.

“But we won and I gave him my winners’ medallion. He deserved it.

“He scored 33 tries in 15 games that year despite playing busted. The lines he can run for a big guy are just unbelievable.”

Still, it wasn’t all plain sailing once he landed that Roosters contract.

Lowe was a regular in the Roosters Under-20s side for three seasons alongside the likes of Tom Symonds, Dylan Napa and Boyd Cordner. But he didn’t get an NRL deal at the end of 2011, despite representing the Junior Kangaroos that year.

“After he played Junior Kangaroos in 2011 he was the only one that didn’t have an NRL contract the next year,” Stephen says. “You get a lot of kids who get a dream run, but he has done it the tough way.”

Lowe might not have scored an NRL contract, but he did have Intrust Super Cup clubs climbing over each other to get his services.

Cowboys coach Paul Green was in charge of Wynnum Manly at the time and was keen to recruit Lowe, who he valued as a big, athletic second-rower who could kick goals.

Lowe turned down Green and signed with the Northern Pride in the Intrust Super Cup for 2012, a turning point in his career after the disappointment of being overlooked for an NRL deal.

“I was a bit downhearted but it made me want to work harder and do everything better,” Ethan says.

“I needed a change, and it was a toss-up going to Wynnum or the Pride but the Cowboys organised a train-and-trial (deal) for me, so I decided my best option was to go with the Pride.

“That was one of the best decisions I made.”

That eventually led to a start with the Cowboys and after playing 12 games in two years following his debut in round 12, 2013, he’s enjoyed a breakout 2015.

Head strength and conditioning coach Andrew Croll, who revamped the Cowboys’ running program last year, sheds light on why Lowe has fired – and why his best is yet to come.

“We do more power-based running now at the Cowboys and that’s where Ethan has excelled,” Croll says.



“In the pre-season he ate up all that stuff. I keep setting targets and he keeps knocking them down.

“Ethan has always had a big aerobic engine and the physical capacity to play 80 minutes, but for him now it’s all about working on the mental side of it to stay in the game for the full time.

“There are still things we are working on with him in the gym but in a player’s first five NRL seasons they are heavily on the up, so he still has a lot more upside. The exciting thing is he’s still untapped.

“We have Gavin Cooper, who I think is the ideal 80-minute back-rower and the ultimate professional.

“Ethan is in that mould and as he progresses and develops he will be a very similar style.”

The 24-year-old, signed at North Queensland until the end of 2016, was suspended for two games for allegedly placing a bet with Centrebet on a game in 2013 which the Cowboys weren’t involved in.

The case remains a mystery because Lowe always insisted he never had an account with the agency at any stage.

He says he has “moved on from all that” now.

Coach Paul Green says the saga was a good lesson but is adamant Lowe has taken all the right strides since.

Even when the Cowboys weren’t firing, Lowe was.

“He stood out more at the start of the year when the rest of the team wasn’t going as good,” Green says.

“Ethan is still learning a bit defensively with his decision making, which is tough for edge back-rowers these days, but he’s developing nicely. It has taken him a few off-seasons to get to the point where he’s an 80-minute player and that’s a big effort for a big guy.

“That’s really helped the way I run my interchange bench having him and Coops able to do that.

“It’s important that we are a club where players feel they can come and be developed and Lowey has been nagging away and played a fair few Q Cup games, got a taste of the NRL and this year has been going really well for us.”

And now he’s a beacon for all the kids in Goondiwindi. To this day, the president of the Goondiwindi Boars Juniors, Barry Horton, tells his young players to think of Lowe as an example of perseverance.

“Ethan shows where guts and determination will get you,” he says.

“A lot of our kids make rep footy but don’t go any further and they get a bit disappointed, but I tell them to look at Ethan’s guts and determination because he went through his junior rugby league without making a rep side but look where he is now. He’s the best example of never giving up and keeping your spirits up.” **RLW**



PASS OFF!

It's the most basic skill in the game... but amazingly, some players could go the whole season without throwing the footy in a match **BY STEVE MASCORD**

IMAGINE PLAYING 139 minutes of footy... and not throwing a single pass.

We still like to think of passing the football as the key skill in our game. That's what we do. We run up and down the field and pass the football in such a way as to evade the numerically equal opposition, placing it on the ground as to accrue points.

But is that really, in 2015, what our game is?

American football derived, very slowly, from rugby union. In rugby union, the same 15 players run, pass, ruck and tackle. Once upon a time, they probably all kicked as well.

Yet in American football, only a small number of players pass the ball. Only a small number of them catch. Some never even see a football from a closer vantage point than the sideline or a huddle.

As rugby league becomes more professional and coaches search for an edge, we have seen the roles of players in different positions change.

Interestingly, while American football evolved towards greater specialisation, it could be argued that our game has actually gone in the opposite direction.

In 2011, someone wrote on an online forum:

"... in the eighties... props were big and slow, second-rowers might've been leaner and a little bit quicker, but both were generally used as battering rams up the middle. The halfback almost always (was) the first receiver... the five-eighth would generally be the second receiver in a backline play and would be similar to a third centre. The centres themselves were classified as inside and outside."

These days props, second-rowers and centres look the same and play similar roles, while the halves can also be interchangeable. Players are more easily defined by the side of the field on which they play than by the old nomenclature.

So if everyone is now big and fast, should everyone not also have ball skills and use them? If you can't imagine playing 139 minutes of NRL without passing the ball, let's get you some help.

That is, help from someone who has. "Not really, but I can't change it," says Canberra forward Mark Nicholls when I ask him if he is proud to top a study *RLW* commissioned from

LOCK UP THE BALL

Raider Mark Nicholls holds the unique distinction of having played the most minutes this year without passing the footy.



NRL Stats into the most minutes played without throwing a pass.

“When I did throw one, I put ‘Toots’ (captain Jarrod Croker) over for a try. So let’s just say I’ve got a good strike rate.”

The only other player with more than 100 minutes of game time without a pass is North Queensland’s Kelepi Tanginoo.

But what does it mean? Is it a poor reflection on the modern game and an indictment of current-era coaching? Nicholls, a utility forward from Leeton who comes across as a rather thoughtful bloke, argues not. Coach Ricky Stuart at no point instructed him to conceal the Steeden upon his person.

“I hadn’t played first grade in two-and-a-half years,” he explains. “When I got my chance again, I didn’t want to blow it.”

“Any young fella would take a while to get the confidence to throw a few passes. For me, when you finally get another crack, you don’t want to give the coach a reason to drop you. You just want to run hard and keep the ball safe.”

“It’s funny, because in NSW Cup

I consider myself as someone with some ball skills. Not just a battering ram. But it took me a few games to feel like that in first grade.

“For a few weeks there, I felt like I was playing up a grade, if you know what I mean. It’s a shame I got injured because after the Souths and Titans games, I was starting to feel comfortable at that level.”

Just as players get more confident in using the ball, according to 25-year-old Nicholls, so do teams.

It’s not your imagination – NRL sides are more adventurous now than they were in the opening rounds.

“At the start of the year, the coaches have their structures and things are kind of driven by statistics and by completions,” Nicholls says.

“Then, as the year goes on, teams look at each other on video and they see things that they might be able to exploit. That’s when teams start trying things.”

“At Canberra we actually use the ball a fair bit in the forwards. That’s why we’re one of the better attacking teams to watch.”

As well as asking NRL Stats who had played the longest without

SAFETY FIRST
Hard-working Tigers back-rower Brenden Santi has thrown the fewest number of passes per minute played this year.

FEWEST PASSES PER MINUTE PLAYED IN 2015

Player (club)	Passes	Minutes	Avg. pass/min.
Brenden Santi (Tigers)	1	260	0.004
Peni Terepo (Eels)	1	250	0.004
Mitchell Dodds (Broncos)	1	250	0.004
George Burgess (Rabbitohs)	4	870	0.005
Darcy Lussick (Eels)	2	359	0.006
Dayne Weston (Storm)	1	174	0.006
Chris Grevsmuhl (Rabbitohs)	4	644	0.006
Kyle Feldt (Cowboys)	1	160	0.006
Cheyse Blair (Sea Eagles)	4	560	0.007
David Fifita (Sharks)	6	806	0.007
Joe Ofahengaue (Broncos)	1	128	0.008
Thomas Burgess (Rabbitohs)	7	747	0.009
Agnatius Paasi (Titans)	4	401	0.009
Suaia Matagi (Roosters)	2	200	0.01
Corey Oates (Broncos)	9	894	0.01
Ethan Lowe (Cowboys)	14	1353	0.01
Leeson Ah Mau (Dragons)	7	669	0.010
Tim Mannah (Eels)	8	722	0.011
Joel Thompson (Dragons)	11	970	0.011
Francis Molo (Broncos)	1	85	0.012

NO PASSES YET IN 2015

Player (club)	Minutes played
Mark Nicholls (Raiders)	139
Kelepi Tanginoo (Cowboys)	102
Nelson Asofa-Solomona (Storm)	95
Mitch Garbutt (ex-Broncos)	88
Willie Manu (Roosters)	84
Aaron Whitchurch (Broncos)	74
Brenton Lawrence (Sea Eagles)	47
Yaw Kiti Glymin (Dragons)	44
Nathaniel Peteru (Warriors)	44
Lamar Liolevave (Tigers)	29
Adam Docker (Panthers)	28
Tom Learoyd-Lahrs (Storm)	21
Patrick Kaufusi (Cowboys)	15
Luke Page (Dragons)	12

*Current up to Rd 19, 2015

throwing a pass, *RLW* also asked them to list those who had thrown the fewest passes per minutes played.

Now, bear in mind that NRL Stats consider a ‘pass’ and an ‘offload’ to be different things.

Basically, a pass is before the attacker has made contact with the defensive line and an offload is afterwards, creating second-phase

play. So, full disclosure there – some of the results may be skewed by that distinction.

Tiger Brenden Santi has thrown the fewest passes per minute played in the NRL, at the rate of 0.038 passes per minute. By comparison, Jake Friend throws 1.55 a minute.

At South Sydney, George Burgess has thrown only four passes in 870 minutes of football.

One of rugby league’s greatest playmakers, Peter Sterling, is scared by the prospect of giant automatons ploughing up the field with no other thought on their minds.

“I don’t want us getting to the situation we have in the NFL, where some players don’t touch the ball for their entire careers,” Sterling tells *RLW*.

“Sure, the position you play in the football team is going to lead to a certain degree of specialisation. We know you are responsible for different things on different parts of the field.”

“But just because you have a role to play shouldn’t nullify the continuing development of your skills.”

Now, if only Pete had got into coaching... *RLW*

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UBET

FOR THE THRILL OF IT

'If you want nice teeth, you have to brush them'

From the great Jack Gibson's witty one-liners to captains who didn't give a toss about the toss, weird and wonderful characters were par for the course during Jimmy Smith's time at the top **BY MATT CLEARY**

JIMMY SMITH IS AN IDEAS man, the thinking-fan's beef-cake. As a player, he describes himself as "a blue-collar tradesman". But he learned from Jack Gibson and played with Brad Fittler, and did his best to be his best. And he learned, and improved, and played 120-odd first-grade games as a ball-playing back-rower or prop who wasn't much of an athlete. He's a smart critter. Smith grew up on a property so remote that Wagga Wagga was considered a big city. He didn't play rugby league until he was 11 when Matt Rodwell's old man, Ken, came to Cootamundra to coach the Bulldogs. Aged 15, Smith was off to boarding school at famous St Gregory's, Campbelltown. It was the making of him.

"I was always going to go to St Greg's, my old man went there," says the 43-year-old as he pilots his ancient golf clubs around Long Reef GC on Sydney's Northern Beaches.

"The fact it was a rugby league school was a happy coincidence. It was great, St Greg's, you were playing good, competitive footy all the time, Thursdays and Saturdays. And any

spare time you were playing touch."

Smith's team would win the prestigious Commonwealth Bank Cup. Eleven of the 13 players would play grade footy. Five played first grade. For a 17-year-old league-mad kid, the televised schools competition was as big as things got.

"We used to watch it all the time," Smith says. "You'd see all these guys come through – Peter Sterling, Greg Alexander, Paul Langmack. Superstars. And you got to play in that comp. And Graeme Hughes is commentating. Billy Anderson is sideline eye..." He shakes his head, the memories fresh.

And so to **Sydney University** where he studied **Agricultural Economics**.

There were approaches from clubs but he was living in the eastern suburbs and the Roosters made sense. He was 18 when Roosters operations manager Barry Van Heekeren took Smith and his father





to meet club supremo Ron Jones. "On the way to the meeting Brian kept saying to my old man that Mr Jones is very particular about being called 'Mr Jones'. My old man shook hands and called him 'Ron', and called him Ron about seven times, just for the sake of it. But I still got the gig."

Young Smith was star-struck. The Roosters pack featured Trevor Gillmeister, Craig Salvatori and Hugh McGahan was captain. His first run-on start was against Western Suburbs at the Sydney Football Stadium, July 26, 1992. "I'd had a few goes playing Under-21s and sitting on the bench for first grade coming on for the last 20 minutes against Manly, the Broncos. It was a blow-out, shaking hands with Toovey, Hasler, Marty Bella. End of a 21s game you're saying 'Thanks, mate'. End of first grade you're saying, 'Thanks Geoff', 'Thanks Des', these legends."

But a run-on start against Wests was another kettle of fighting fish. The Magpies pack featured Darren Britt, David Gillespie, Joe Thomas, Paul Langmack, Bob Lindner and Jason Lidden. A mate from the 21s asked Smith, "Which one of those blokes do you reckon is going to hit you the hardest?"

"I'd have said 'Cement' Gillespie,

probably," Smith laughs. "But thankfully he was out injured."

First set of six he gave away a penalty for tackling his old St Greg's team-mate Jason Taylor late. Taylor slotted the goal. "Ended up losing. But I'll never forget it," Smith says.

Though he describes himself as "rank-and-file" – and given his peers in the back row, Steve Menzies, Gorden Tallis, Ben Kennedy, Brad Thorne, he's probably not lying. But with 121 games in Sydney and another 28 in England – you can hang a hat on that, be proud of it. Is he?

"Absolutely, and looking back you are," Smith says. "At the time you're probably self-absorbed and doing it day-to-day. Lot of the guys, there's athletes you can turn into a footballer. I was never an athlete. I played every sport to some level but was never in the 100m sprint. But you need that athletic base. Look at the guys who excelled, my contemporaries, Menzies, Tallis, he was unbelievable. If I could have anything, it would've been a bit of pace. I blame Mum. Dad reckons he was quick."

If his pace never improved, Smith's preparation did. And Jack Gibson was the key. "Anyone that came into his sphere improved," Smith says. "He came back to the Roosters when

Russell Fairfax was sacked and was there three or four years as a manager. He just made you think about things. If you wanted to get better at something you had to prepare for it, put in the time. He used the analogy that if you want nice teeth you have to brush them. And to be a better footballer, be better prepared."

And away goes Smith, riffing on self-improvement. It's his Thing. "John Daly once asked Tiger Woods to come have a drink with him. Tiger said, 'If I had your talent, John, I would'. There's a book I'm reading called *The Talent Code*. And the underlying thing is people log 10,000 hours to become good at something. Michelangelo, his first masterpiece he logged aged 24. People said he's a genius. He said, 'If only they knew how hard I had to work to become this good'. He was indentured from the age of seven."

After 23 games with Souths in '99 (after which they were kicked out of the comp) Smith headed to Salford on his first overseas trip.

"It was all brand new, a trip to the UK in which you were lucky enough to play rugby league along the way. And that was the prevailing sentiment at Salford City Reds. The whole thing was a throwback to 15 years before modern Australian rugby league. The lack of preparation, facilities. At the time there were four big clubs – Leeds, Wigan, Bradford and St Helens. Everyone else played off for fifth. And if you didn't get relegated, you celebrated."

Smith was one of four Australians at Salford with Jason Webber, Darren Brown and Jason Nicol. His last game was against Allan Langer and Andrew Gee, Salford away to Warrington at Wilderspool in front of 6969.

"Brown was our captain and he went out to toss," Smith recalls. "He came back and we said, 'What are we doing, Brown?' He says, 'I don't care, I've got Alfie's jersey after the game'. That was the mindset. I tried to swap with Tawera Nikau. He didn't want to swap. Ended up swapping with a bloke called Jerome Guisset, a Frenchman, played for the Raiders."

And that was it. Last game of rugby league. He was 28 years old.

"I might've finished up too early, I might've stayed in England," Smith admits. "But a couple of injuries, and I was thinking there were other things in life to do."

Today you can barely flick on the wireless or turn on the box without clocking our Jimmy and his wholesome and wise ways of rugby league. He's articulate and smart, and makes a good lick of sense. And he's a good fella, too. Good luck to him.

Thanks to Long Reef Golf Club. For membership, dining, functions or wedding inquiries call (02) 9971 8113

DON'T GIVE UP YOUR DAY JOB JUST YET, JIMMY!

RLW's Matt Cleary (white shirt) surveys Smith's form at Long Reef Golf Club on Sydney's Northern Beaches.

PREGAME

ROUND 21

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THE BIG GAME!

Sinking Sharks

If Cronulla are to reach the finals in 2015, they will need to buck a worrying trend **BY STEVEN RUSSO**

STATE OF ORIGIN IS THE Mick Fanning of the NRL – it causes the Sharks to lose their bite. Like how the Aussie surfer bashed the stuffing out of his South African great white, the post-Origin run home has done a number on footy's Sharks in the past decade.

Between 2005-14, the Sharks have won only 22 of the 79 fixtures played after Origin – a lamentable success rate of just 27.8 per cent.

In fact, Cronulla have won the majority of their post-Origin matches just twice in the last 10 years, in 2008 and 2013 – the only two seasons throughout that period they've won a final.

Their most notable collapse came in 2012. At the conclusion of the Origin series, Shane Flanagan's men sat in third place, but managed only two wins from their last eight regular season games to limp into seventh position, then lose a sudden-death qualifying final against Canberra.

Quiz coach Flanagan about the late-season fades and he says the explanation is simple. Origin has historically taken its toll on his key players like Paul Gallen (left), Luke Lewis and Andrew Fifita.

"The series really takes it out of you with all the training and mental preparation," Flanagan says.

"Back in 2012 our key players were tired and injured. After going through a full series, Gal has often come out of Origin injured, licking his wounds until the end of the year.

"It won't be the case this year."

Flanagan says 2015 is the first time in years Gallen has come back from the rep season in decent nick. Throw in Lewis' surprise snub from the Blues side and the coach says his troops come into the final six rounds of the competition feeling unusually fresh.

"We're in fine shape this year . . . we've come out of the Origin period the best we've ever been," he says.

"Andrew (Fifita) only played one game; Gal's come out fresh and healthy because he hasn't played a lot of footy."

The Sharks have a mixed run home to the finals. Starting with this Saturday's clash against the Warriors at Mt Smart, their next three matches will be a tricky – after their trip to New Zealand, they face the Cowboys and Storm at home. But from there the road is smoother: their last three fixtures are against the cellar-dwelling Tigers (home), Eels (away) and Sea Eagles (home).

Flanagan insists there are no easy games ahead, but he's heartened by the fact four of their remaining matches will be played in the Shire.

"Any game you drop is a danger game, you need to be prepared," he says. "Maybe later on in the year – from round 24 onwards – some teams might lose their enthusiasm and focus because their season is over.

"But at this point sides are still fighting to get off the bottom, get in the eight or stay in the eight. The best thing for us is that we have four of our last five games at home." **RLW**

POST-ORIGIN PERFORMANCE 2005-14

Club	Games	W	L	D	Win%
Storm	78	55	23	-	70.5
Sea Eagles	77	50	27	-	64.9
Rabbitohs	77	43	34	-	55.8
Knights	78	40	37	1	51.3
Cowboys	79	40	39	-	50.6
Roosters	79	40	38	1	50.6
Broncos	78	39	38	1	50.0
Warriors	77	38	37	2	49.4
Bulldogs	78	38	40	-	48.7
Tigers	77	37	40	-	48.1
Raiders	78	37	41	-	47.4
Eels	78	37	41	-	47.4
Dragons	78	37	41	-	47.4
Panthers	78	34	43	1	43.6
Titans	63	26	37	-	41.3
Sharks	79	22	57	-	27.8

Source: David Middleton, League Information Services



FRIDAY, JULY 31, 7.35PM

Roosters v Bulldogs

Allianz Stadium

HISTORY: Played 165, Roosters 82, Bulldogs 78, drawn 5.

THIS GROUND: Played 22, Roosters 11, Dogs 11.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Roosters 24 bt Bulldogs 10 at ANZ Stadium, rd 10, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

4 Wins by the Roosters from their past five games against the Bulldogs. But the Dogs have won four of their past five matches at Allianz Stadium.

103 Points scored by the Roosters in their past four games at Allianz. They have conceded only 20 points.

5 Tries by Bulldogs second-rower Frank Pritchard from his last four Friday night games.

8 Wins by Roosters centre Michael Jennings (*right*) from 11 games against the Bulldogs.



ROOSTERS \$1.55
BULLDOGS \$2.45



FRIDAY, JULY 31, 7.45PM

Tigers v Storm

Leichhardt Oval

HISTORY: Played 25, Storm 16, Tigers 9.

THIS GROUND: Played 10, Tigers 7, Storm 3.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Storm 28 bt Tigers 6 at Campbelltown Stadium, rd 21, 2014.

MAGIC NUMBERS

4 Wins by Wests Tigers from their past six games against Melbourne at Leichhardt Oval.

10 Wins by the Storm boys from their past 12 Friday night games.

92 Points conceded by Wests Tigers in their last three appearances at Leichhardt.

5 Consecutive losses for veteran Tigers winger Pat Richards at Leichhardt Oval, stretching back to Rd 5, 2014.



TIGERS \$2.60
STORM \$1.50



SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 5PM (NZ TIME)

Warriors v Sharks

Mt Smart Stadium

HISTORY: Played 34, Sharks 18, Warriors 16.

THIS GROUND: Played 15, Warriors 9, Sharks 6.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Warriors 20 bt Sharks 16 at Remondis Stadium, rd 9, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

5 Years since the Warriors last defeated Cronulla twice in a season.

4 Wins by Sharks coach Shane Flanagan from his last five games against the Warriors.

3 Wins by Cronulla from their past 12 appearances across the ditch.

5 Tries by Warriors winger Manu Vatuvei from his past four games against the team from the Shire.



WARRIORS \$1.50
SHARKS \$2.60



SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 5.30PM

Cowboys v Raiders

1300Smiles Stadium

HISTORY: Played 35, Raiders 20, Cowboys 15.

THIS GROUND: Played 17, Cowboys 10, Raiders 7.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Cowboys 21 bt Raiders 20 at GIO Stadium, rd 15, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

7 Wins by the Cowboys from their past nine against the Raiders. It's also been nine years since the Raiders won in Townsville.

110 Points scored by the Raiders in their past four games against the Cowboys.

2 Wins by the Raiders from five night-time games so far in the 2015 season.

2 Wins by Raiders coach Ricky Stuart from his last seven games against North Queensland.



COWBOYS \$1.20
RAIDERS \$4.50



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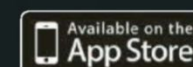
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MY PREGAME ROUTINE

A meticulous ritual and a few bags of Maltesers get Bulldogs skipper *James Graham* ready for action

THURSDAY

I've got very set rituals, which I barely ever change. On Thursday we have a team run at Belmore. After that we head up to a cafe in Belmore called Jobel's to get a feed there. I just have a chicken or ham sandwich. Then I drive back to Cronulla for a coffee and a swim down in the rock pools. In the evening I'll go home and I'll make a big pot of chicken pasta – all from scratch. After dinner it's normally a cup of tea with Maltesers, then I just chill out with a hot water bottle on my back. Sometimes I might have a flick through the tip sheet before going to bed about 11pm.

GAME DAY

I try and sleep in as much as I can and just wake up naturally, maybe about 10ish. First thing I do is head out to Cronulla for another dip in the ocean. I know it's really cold in winter and I certainly get some funny looks when I go in. Actually, the first time I did it I was cursing myself, because I knew if I played well it would become a ritual, and lo and behold it happens every week! Breakfast is strictly crunchy peanut butter – never smooth – on crumpets, not toast!

MIDDAY

This is going to sound really strange but I actually enjoy tidying up the house, because it gets my mind off things. I'll often just put washing away or do the dishes – it's sort of weird. Then I'll just sit down and watch something on TV, basically whatever's on the planner. I hate wasting time, but game day is just one of the times you do just that, particularly when you have an evening game. Lunch is left-over chicken pasta and I might sneak in a bag of Maltesers if I'm feeling peckish. I'll probably leave for the game around 4pm.

"I GO FOR A DIP IN THE OCEAN BEFORE EVERY GAME. I KNOW IT'S REALLY COLD IN WINTER AND I CERTAINLY GET SOME FUNNY LOOKS WHEN I GO IN"



6PM

First thing I do when I arrive at the ground is have a massage and a stretch, then I'll have another quick flick through the game plan before hopping in the ice bath. This year's actually been a little different, having to do the coin toss as captain has messed my routine up a little, which I'm not too happy about! After that I get my strapping done, this includes my chest, shoulder, wrists and arms.

7PM

I have to warm up in a T-shirt, I can't warm up in a jersey. I just don't like it. What we do out there basically depends on what the coaching staff wants. Usually it's a few drills with the ball and a little bit of work on the tackle technique with a stretch thrown in to start up the engine.

7.30PM

After we come back in Dessie will usually have a quick word, then I have a blast of the smelling salts just to perk myself up a little. A few of the boys will have a word – I may weigh in if I feel I have something to say, but the floor's open to anyone.

9.30PM

We'll sing the team song if we win, but recovery is always the same win, lose or draw. We jump in the ice bath then we strap this device to our body that sends impulses through us – it's hard to explain exactly what it is. If we have a long turn around, we might have a couple of beers and Crust look after us by delivering a stack of pizzas for us. After that I shower up, take photos with a few kids and sponsors and go home.

10.30PM

When I get home I find it really hard to go to sleep because it's difficult to shut my mind down. There are so many things going through my head after a game – and that's win, lose or draw. I'm often asking myself, 'Should I have done this? Could I have done this better', I usually don't fall asleep until 2 or 3am.



SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 7.30PM

Sea Eagles v Broncos

Central Coast Stadium

HISTORY: Played 40, Sea Eagles 20, Broncos 19, drawn 1.

THIS GROUND: First meeting

LAST TIME THEY MET: Broncos 44 bt Sea Eagles 10 at Suncorp Stadium, rd 13, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

5 Wins by Manly from their past seven games against the Broncos. They have also won 12 of 15 games played on the Central Coast.

7 Wins by the Broncos from nine matches away from home in 2015.

4 Tries by Broncos centre Jack Reed (left) from his past three games against Manly.

5 Wins by the Broncos from their past six games played on a Saturday.

UBET SEA EAGLES \$2.75
BRONCOS \$1.45



SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2PM

Dragons v Knights

Jubilee Oval

HISTORY: Played 30, Dragons 20, Knights 10.

THIS GROUND: Played 6, Dragons 3, Knights 3.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Dragons 13 bt Knights 0 at Hunter Stadium, rd 5, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

5 Wins by St George Illawarra from their past six games against the Knights.

9 Consecutive wins at Jubilee Oval by Knights' second-rower Beau Scott.

1 Win by Knights coach Rick Stone from four games against St George Illawarra.

6 Losses by the Knights from their past seven daytime games.

6 Years since Newcastle last triumphed on their travels to Kogarah.

UBET DRAGONS \$1.50
KNIGHTS \$2.60

COMING UP

ROUND 22

Friday, August 7

Broncos v Bulldogs at Suncorp Stadium, 7.35pm
Sea Eagles v Rabbitohs at Brookvale Oval, 7.35pm

Saturday, August 8

Warriors v Dragons at Westpac Stadium, Wellington, 5pm (NZ time)
Sharks v Cowboys at Remondis Stadium, 5.30pm
Eels v Panthers at TIO Stadium, Darwin, 7pm (NT time)

Sunday, August 9

Storm v Titans at AAMI Park, 2pm
Knights v Roosters at Hunter Stadium, 4pm

Monday, August 10

Raiders v Wests Tigers at GIO Stadium, 7pm

ROUND 23

Thursday, August 13

Cowboys v Rabbitohs at 1300Smiles Stadium, 7.45pm

Friday, August 14

Broncos v Dragons at Suncorp Stadium, 7.45pm

Saturday, August 15

Tigers v Knights at Campbelltown, 3pm
Panthers v Warriors at Pepper Stadium, 5.30pm
Roosters v Eels at Allianz Stadium, 7.30pm

Sunday, August 16

Raiders v Sea Eagles at GIO Stadium, 2pm
Bulldogs v Titans at Central Coast Stadium, 4pm

Monday, August 17

Sharks v Storm at Remondis Stadium, 7pm



SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 4PM

Rabbitohs v Panthers

ANZ Stadium

HISTORY: Played 76, Rabbitohs 42, Panthers 33, drawn 1.

THIS GROUND: Played 5, Rabbitohs 5, Panthers 0.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Panthers 20 bt Rabbitohs 6 at Pepper Stadium, rd 17, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

12 Years since the Panthers last defeated the Rabbitohs twice in the one season.

50 Points by Rabbitohs halfback Adam Reynolds from five games against the Panthers.

5 Wins by the Rabbitohs from six daytime appearances so far this season.

2 Wins by the Panthers from their past 10 games at ANZ Stadium.

UBET RABBITOHS \$1.35
PANTHERS \$3.20



MONDAY, AUGUST 3, 7PM

Titans v Eels

Cbus Super Stadium

HISTORY: Played 12, Titans 8, Eels 4.

THIS GROUND: Played 6, Titans 4, Eels 2.

LAST TIME THEY MET: Titans 38 bt Eels 16 at Pirtek Stadium, rd 6, 2015.

MAGIC NUMBERS

4 Wins by the Titans from their past five games against the Eels.

1 Win by the Gold Coast from their past five Monday night games.

7 Losses by the Titans from nine games at Cbus Super Stadium in 2015.

4 Tries by Titans speedster James Roberts from his past two matches against Parramatta.

UBET TITANS \$1.60
EELS \$2.35



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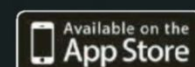
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THE BEST OF BOTH WEMBLEYS

St Helens star James Roby is one game away from returning to the iconic venue where he enjoys a rich history **BY PHIL WILKINSON**

MANY FOOTY FANS already knew James Roby had made Wembley history. Until now, no-one knew just exactly how much.

In 2007, the St Helens hooker became the first rugby league player to cross the tryline at the rebuilt 'new' Wembley, in Saints' Challenge Cup final win against Catalans. And with Roby only 80 minutes away from this year's decider – St Helens face Leeds this weekend in a mouthwatering semi-final – he has revealed it's not his only significant link with one of the world's most iconic venues.

"I'm very lucky to have played at both Wembleys," says Roby, nodding to the old ground that was closed in 2000 and demolished three years later. "I played an Under-11s curtain-raiser there in '96, St Helens Town versus Batley, and we drew. I've still got some of the grass in my mum's bedroom! I know it's not the same as playing a Challenge Cup final there... but it's still special to me."

Roby enjoyed the last of his three successive Challenge Cup final triumphs – all with hometown club St Helens – in 2008. Since then, they have failed to even reach the final of the famous 119-year-old knockout

competition. Little wonder the 29-year-old rake is desperate to end that barren run.

"We know what's at stake (this weekend), we're 80 minutes away from Wembley," Roby says. "There are a lot of players in our squad who haven't experienced a Challenge Cup final, so we'll be doing everything we can to get there. Everyone loves the Challenge Cup. Growing up, I held the Cup ahead of the grand final. It's got that magic about it, the romance... it's fantastic."

Roby has been widely regarded as one of the Poms' best players for years. Blessed with an engine Lewis Hamilton would envy, he regularly motors through 80 minutes – topping tackle counts and metres gained charts along the way – and providing Saints with a creative spark.

Yet the strong form of combative Wigan No.9 Micky McLorum, along with Daryl Clark's Man of Steel exploits last year and Josh Hodgson's impact at Canberra, has prompted some pundits to suggest Roby's days as England's premier hooker are numbered.

"I thought I was a pretty decent No.9, but I'm telling you, I never came close to this kid," gushes his

coach Keiron Cunningham, the Great Britain legend who's the subject of a bronze statue outside Saints' Langtree Park home.

"There's nothing like him in the competition. What he does, and what he gets through, we probably take for granted. He did the same when he was a kid and won awards. Now it's expected."

Roby is modest about his heavy involvement in matches – "players see me next to Mose Masoe... they're obviously going to run at me!" – but is keen to stave off competition from his peers and play for England in the Test series against New Zealand later this year.

The first Cup semi-final this weekend is box office, pitting current Super League champions St Helens against reigning Cup-holders Leeds.

The next day, Hull KR attempt to overcome Warrington to secure the club's first Cup final appearance in almost 30 years. The Wolves have won three of the last six Challenge Cup finals. **RLW**

**Challenge Cup semi-finals (AEST):
Leeds v St Helens (Saturday 5am,
Fox Sports 1), Warrington v Hull KR
(Saturday 9.30pm, Fox Sports 4).**

FAR&WIDE

HAWAII SAY ALOHA TO RUGBY LEAGUE

Massive turn out for Ohana Cup is a sign of big things to come

BY STEVE MASCORD

OFFICIALS ARE HAILING THIS year's Ohana Cup at Honolulu's Aloha Stadium as the best yet, with Samoa thrilling around 8000 fans in their 20-4 win over Tonga.

The Hawaiian Rugby League are still trying to lure Penrith and Brisbane to the holiday isles, despite the reservations of the NRL, and plan to use next year's event as a precursor to a state competition for domestic players.

"We'll shoot for a four-month competition starting next July," says organiser Steve Johnson.

Johnson, the Western Corridor NRL bid boss, also revealed he wanted this year's game to be a double-header, with the United States taking on Fiji in the earlier game. But the newly rebranded USA Hawks weren't interested.

He said ESPN Radio and Western Union are two American companies hugely impressed with what they saw just over a week ago and keen to be involved again in future.

"Samoa is one of the big places Western Union does transfers to from Hawaii and we spoke to them about putting something back," he says.

"American sports aren't involved in the community like rugby league is. That impresses a lot of companies in Hawaii.

"ESPN Sport were blown away by rugby league. They'd never seen it before and they want to cover whatever we do."

ON THE MAINLAND, THE USA HAVE named a 35-man train-on squad for the upcoming internationals against Canada.

And, as is consistent with the change of administration for the game in America, there are 28 potential international newcomers.

A number of training camps are to be held. The USARL National Championship final will be held on rugby league's 120th birthday, August 29.

Twitter: @RLWfarandwide



Scan this page for all the latest news and results from England

BRAINBUSTERS

Fancy yourself as a footy trivia know-it-all? Then test yourself with these tricky rugby league puzzles

QUIZ

1. What is Trent Merrin's junior club?
2. Who scored the last-ever grand final try at the SCG?
3. Which current NRL coach was the top pointscorer in 1998?
4. Name the Broncos winger who made his sole first-grade appearance in the club's 40-0 loss to Melbourne in the 2007 qualifying final.
5. In which year were Souths docked two competition points for using Scott Wilson as an ineligible replacement?
6. Which Queensland forward chalked up 24 consecutive Origin appearances between 1991-98?
7. Name the former Maroons Origin forward who holds the record as the oldest player to represent the Northern Eagles.
8. Name the two second-rowers in the ARL Team of the Century.
9. Who captained Illawarra in their first-ever finals appearance in '92?
10. With which club did former top flight referee Greg Hartley play three first-grade games?

ANSWERS:
1. Shellharbour City
2. Chris Sharkey
3. Iwan Tuk
4. Alwyn Cleary
5. 1988
6. Simon Simpson
7. Gary Larson
8. Owen Cunningham
9. Ron Coote and Norm Provan
10. Newtown.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

4. Ricky Stuart's nickname (6)
8. Penrith coach 1994-2001. (7)
11. English club Craig Coleman played for during the 1992-93 off-season. (7)
14. Former Newtown five-eighth, who was the subject of an award-winning RLW story while imprisoned in Thailand in 1985. Paul _____ (7)
15. Stalwart Cronulla five-eighth. Played 223 games for the Sharks between 1989-2000. (6)
17. Raiders legend Jason Croker comes from this NSW town (9)
18. Dragons halfback in their back-to-back grand final losses in 1992-93. (9)
19. NSWRL wooden spooners in 1989. (9)
21. Former Rabbitohs, Dragons, Eels, Rams and Raiders fullback. Rod _____ (6)
23. Ron Gibbs' nickname. (5)
24. Broncos' jersey sponsor from 1994-96. (9)
25. Geoff Toovey made his first-grade debut in 198. (5)
28. Scored the first try of the 1993 grand final. Chris _____ (5)

DOWN

1. Former Illawarra fullback, now a player manager. David _____ (5)
2. Jonathan Davies comes from this country. (5)
3. Former Warriors prop who now plays for Huddersfield. Ukuma _____ (4)



5. Manly's first-grade coach in 1989. (8)
6. Nickname shared by Dale Shearer and Chris Lawrence. (5)
7. English back-rower, played seven games for the Knights in 1995. Chris _____ (5)
9. Mulletted Parramatta fullback, finished his career with North Queensland in 1998. Scott _____ (5)
10. He was the first-ever Clive Churchill Medallist. (8)
12. English detective, and former RLW gossip columnist. (8)
13. **Photo clue:** Former South Sydney prop, allegedly had a contact lens ripped from his eye in the first Charity Shield match in 1982. Gary _____ (6)
16. NSW assistant coach Matt Parish played first grade with this club. (7)
17. Name shared between an NRL team, a Kiwi province and a sports clothing company. (10)
20. Former Knight, Seagull and Dragon played three games of Origin between 1992-93. (7)
21. Andrew Walker's last NRL club. (5)
22. Before they were nicknamed the Vikings, Widnes were known as the _____ (7)
26. **Photo clue:** Kiwi winger, played for Norths and Canberra before joining the Warriors in '95. Sean _____ (5)
27. Number of Australian clubs that Gary Freeman played for. (4)



NAME THE YEAR

Win!

\$50

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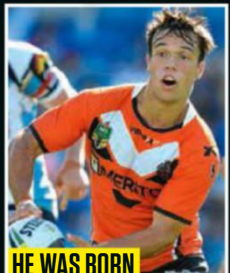
To go into the running to win, check out these five clues below and send your answer to us by 5pm on Thursday, July 30.

MAIL entries to Classic NAME THE YEAR, GPO Box 4088, Sydney 2001 or **EMAIL** rlw@bauer-media.com.au

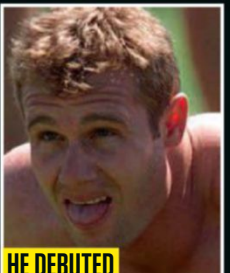
Make sure you include your address and a daytime phone number.

Winner will be announced in our August 3 issue.

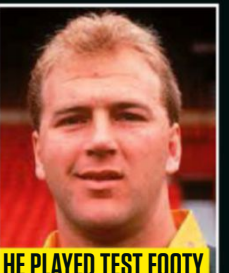
JULY 20 WINNER: PAUL BRAIDEN, SANDGATE, QLD



HE WAS BORN



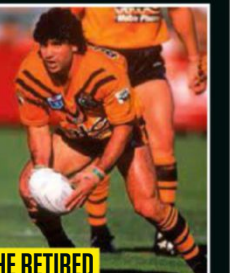
HE DEBUTED



HE PLAYED TEST FOOTY



HE WON A TITLE



HE RETIRED

THE CLUES

ANSWERS: ACROSS: 4. Sticky, 8. Simmons, 11. Salford, 14. Hayward, 15. Healey, 17. Crookwell, 18. Goldthorpe, 19. Illawarra, 21. Maybon, 23. Rambo, 24. Traveland, 25. Fight, 28. Johns. DOWN: 1. Riolo, 2. Wales, 3. Tai, 5. Thompson, 6. Rowdy, 7. Joynt, 9. Mahon, 10. Sterling, 12. Sherlock, 13. Hambly, 16. Balmaln, 17. Canterbury, 20. Brunken, 21. Manly, 22. Chemics, 26. Hoppe, 27. Four.

'If ever a guy deserved a story about him, it's Alf'

Alf Scott has dedicated his life to his beloved Moree Boars, rubbing shoulders with Little Masters and recording a stack of big milestones along the way

BY ROBERT BURGIN

HOW DOES THE MOREE BOARS' electrifying 2015 fullback Brenton Cochrane measure up against legendary *RLW* Immortal Clive Churchill?

You could do a lot worse than ask Boars record-keeper Alf Scott.

The club stalwart, who celebrated his 91st birthday last week, has stood on the sidelines to watch both men represent his beloved home town.

"Alf's records go right back to the 1950s and are widely recognised as among the best in the game," Boars president Todd Mitchell says.

"He can tell you who kicked how many goals – probably even how many minutes they played – from 60 years ago.

"And he's still pretty sharp, even if he does insist his memory isn't what it used to be.

"He'll sit there and analyse a game and be able to tell you where your strengths and weaknesses are."

Born in 1924, Alf remains incredibly active, not only offering invaluable service to his local community, but still driving independently and flying yearly to visit family in Perth.

His life reads like a tall tale, serving Australia during World War II in Borneo, trialling with St George Dragons in 1947 and even caddying for golfing great Norman Von Nida.

Infection and injury meant he never reached the summit as a player, but in terms of contribution to rugby league, he's just about without peer.

He was secretary and treasurer of the Moree club from 1951 to 2014, including the season in 1961 where 'Little Master' Churchill played one last swansong season in the bush.

"I can remember Alf being treasurer there when I played in the '70s," recalls former *RLW* editor and Inverell product Tony Durkin.



"We caught up not long ago and he's remarkable for his age, very spritely and with an incredible memory.

"Certainly his passion for the game has not dimmed one iota.

"If ever a guy deserved a story about him, it's Alf."

While rugby league is Alf's defining passion, he has been duly recognised for his efforts across a number of endeavours.

He has been pivotal to the Moree Cancer Support Group, held membership of the local swimming club since 1932, assisted Parents and Citizens committees, greyhound racing, the RSL ... and he's even a former mason.

Alf is so ingrained in the landscape he has served as a contributor to *The Moree Champion* newspaper for half a century and

worked at Assef's clothing shop in the town for 57 years.

"He's a terrific old fella," president Mitchell adds.

"To this day, Alf still hops on the team bus and travels to all our away games with us, coming home late at night.

"We would be lost without him in many respects.

"He'll walk up to guys in the sheds before a match and say, 'You're playing your 100th game today for the Boars', which most players don't have any idea about otherwise.

"It's amazing to think what he's seen and done in his lifetime."

A non-smoker and non-drinker these days, Alf has previously been described as having "blue-and-white blood" in his veins, a reference to the Boars' colours.

His memory of Moree stretches back to a time when there was no water, road or footpath connecting his family home to the rest of the town.

If there is one great accomplishment of his long and full life thus far it would be his marriage to wife Beryl in 1949, three years after discharging from the military.

Together they had children Richard and Susan, before Beryl's passing in 1988 inspired Alf's enduring involvement in cancer support.

About the only thing that can keep him from a Boars game is the chance to spend some time with family – as he chose to do last weekend, missing the match against Wyallda to be in Sydney for his birthday. *RLW*

A CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK? YEAH, RIGHT...

Wynnum back-rower Mitchell Frei loves his famous dad to death, but it's a good thing he didn't inherit his old man's rugby league skills!

BY JOEL GOULD

IN ONE SENSE MITCHELL Frei seemed destined for a career in professional sport.

But the Wynnum Manly back-rower, signed to the Sydney Roosters in 2016, admits it was never going to be in the sports of cricket and Aussie Rules, where his dad Harry Frei made his mark.

German-born Harry was a VFL player for Footscray and a left arm fast bowler for Queensland, but rugby league wasn't his thing.

"I never really saw my old man play, only in old video tapes, but he always made sure me and my brothers were running around and keeping active," Frei says.

"But I was hopeless at cricket and Aussie Rules.

"I thought I was pretty good at cricket, but it turned out I was not good at all.

"Dad said he played one game of rugby league at fullback. He went up for the ball, ran 10 metres and then bounced it. They all sprayed him and he said he didn't know what he had done wrong!"

Mitchell, on the other hand, has played rugby league since he was six.

The 23-year-old former Queensland Under-16s and Under-18s representative had a season at the Knights in 2013 when Wayne Bennett was the coach but didn't play NRL.

The former Broncos Under-20s player wasn't able to get a gig at Brisbane for next year under Bennett due to the plethora of back-rowers at Red Hill.

But he says there are no hard feelings, only admiration for the Mastercoach's valuable advice.

"There would never be hard feelings at all because it's a cut-throat business, footy," Frei says.

"I had to live with Wayne for a couple of weeks and that was a bit of an eye-opener.

"He always said to me that if you make sure everything is going well off the field, then that will convert to on the field.

"That's one key thing I have taken from him."

Frei has heeded the advice. He enjoys working as a roofer, alongside a good mate, and is close to his family and friends.

But it's on the park with the

Seagulls that he has excelled.

Wynnum coach Jon Buchanan says Frei, the club's player of the year in 2014, has done a great job running slick lines on the edge.

The presence of Origin back-rowers Aidan Guerra and Boyd Cordner means Frei will have his work cut out breaking into the Roosters' first-grade side next year.

"But when I knew he was talking to the Roosters I said to him, 'Don't let that spook you', because it's a good thing to have that quality ahead of you," Buchanan says.

"Spending time in their system will make him a better footballer.

"He runs a fantastic line, and being six-foot-four and 109 kilos that always helps.

"Mitchell is in the mould of a Cordner in terms of the lines that he runs and because he likes the left side.

"He's not your typical 23-year-old... he's mature, he's not full of himself and he's all about hard work."

Frei isn't daunted by the task ahead at the Roosters and knows he will grow as a player under a great coach.

"It's more of a blessing knowing they have two Origin back-rowers, because at Origin time next year there might be a few spots up for grabs," he says.



Scan on Tuesday for weekend lower-grade and country results

"The thing that excites me is how players have improved under Trent Robinson. That's what I need to do to make it to the next level."

Buchanan says Frei, a bit like Gorden Tallis in his heyday, "has a blow-up in him"... but for all the right reasons.

"We played a game in PNG last year and he scored a dead-set try but the refs disallowed it," Buchanan grins. "He's blown up deluxe and went on for 10 minutes and I had to tell him to pull his head in.

"Mitchell is just one of those blokes who is very passionate. If he knows something isn't right, he's adamant about it. He doesn't blow up unless he knows he's right."

Harry Frei made his first-class cricket debut at 31 and his son remains just as dedicated to making it in rugby league, even though an NRL gig has so far eluded him.

"It just shows you are never too old to make your debut... so it gives you a bit of confidence in that way," Mitchell says.

"My main focus is to go to the Roosters and keep improving, but here at Wynnum our coach JB wouldn't be out of place at an NRL club, so I'm fortunate to be under him." **RLW**





DEAN OF ADMISSIONS

BORN

August 28, 1965,
Auckland, New Zealand

CLUB FOOTY

City Newton Dragons
1985; Glenora Bears
1986-87 & 1990-91;
Canberra 1988, 4 games;
Rochdale Hornets
1989-90, 24 games,
12 tries, 48 points.

REP FOOTY

Auckland 1985-87 &
1990-91; New Zealand
1986-87, 1990-91,
11 Tests, 4 tries,
16 points; 8 tour
matches, 2 tries,
8 points.

● Played junior football
with Glenora, Mt Albert
and Waitemata.

● Made his first-grade
debut for Canberra v
Canterbury at Belmore
Sports Ground, Round 4,
1988.

(League Information Services)

The former Kiwi hardman has been knocked out on the field and knocked-down in business . . . but he has always got off the canvas and battled on *By Tony Adams*

"I've done some dumb things – I've lost \$1 million in a day . . . but I learned from footy that you never, ever give up. I climbed out of the hole and am doing OK now"

You come from a real Kiwi rugby league family, don't you?

My father played and his father played, and had good careers in first grade. And I have a cousin who played for the Junior Kiwis. But I was the only one in the family who won Test selection and they were all very proud of me when that came about.

You had a brief stint with Canberra in 1988. Why so short?

The New Zealand Rugby League made it hard for players to play in the Australian competition back then – you had to have played six Tests or gone on two tours. I didn't qualify but got around it by going to the Raiders for what was termed a 'rookie stint' . . . basically an apprenticeship. (Former Kiwi star) Tony Kemp went to Newcastle at the same time and didn't want to go back to work in the freezing works in New Zealand and took court action, claiming restraint of trade. He won, which opened the door for a lot of Kiwis to move to Oz.

How was your stint with the Raiders?

They had 20 internationals on their books – guys like Mal Meninga, Gary Belcher, John Ferguson, Laurie Daley, Ricky Stuart and my Kiwi mate Brent Todd. I felt like I was in Nirvana. A few years later, they got busted for rorting the salary cap and I'm pretty sure they were guilty (laughs). Just look at that team! I actually made my debut in the inaugural World Sevens in 1988 and we made the final. It is kind of ironic because I could see the potential there and that was part of the inspiration behind my move to create the NRL Nines in Auckland a quarter of a century later. But overall, I struggled with the pace of Sydney footy, and with such a strong Canberra team, I battled to get a game. It didn't go as well as I would have liked.

Where did you go from there?

I needed to try to get my career back on track and went to Rochdale Hornets in



HITMAN: Whether it was in the ring or on the field, Dean Loneragan was always ready for battle.

the UK, where I went OK. The English game suited me more and I had a good season over there.

You actually won your first Test jumper a few years earlier?

I will never forget as a kid in 1983, I watched an Australia-New Zealand Test. I was in awe of the way guys like Nick Wright and Joe Ropati ripped into the Aussies. It inspired me. I said, 'I want to do that'. I toured Australia and Papua New Guinea in 1986 but didn't make my Test debut until the following year. I was opposite (Australian front-rower) Peter Tunks and he was a tough man – he didn't make it easy for me. The coach just said to me, 'Don't drop the ball and don't miss any tackles' so I did my best. I went OK.

You had some famous battles against Balmain legend Steve Roach?

My first experience against him was in a game between Auckland and Balmain one pre-season. I went to tackle him the first time he ran the ball up. I think we clashed heads because I woke up in the dressing room flat on my back. He kept playing . . . but 20 years later he told me he got 20 stitches in his noggin from it. We must both have hard heads!

And then there was the famous Test stoush in 1991?

It was a big Test in Melbourne and he knocked me out cold . . . again! It was a bad one. I've seen video since and I am asleep on the ground with my leg convulsing . . . for some reason it went into spasm and my whole body started to shake. Scary. People who saw it tell me they thought I was dying. They took me off on a stretcher but I think the doc must have missed the convulsions because 10 minutes later, I ran back out there. My head was a little fuzzy but all I remember thinking was, 'I worked hard to get here . . . I don't want to give up my spot to the next guy'. It wasn't the smartest thing I've done and people reckon I could have got brain damage. Some say I *do* have brain damage . . . maybe I do. (laughs) But we beat the Aussies and it's a night I will never forget – even though I don't remember too much about it! That knockout is what I am best remembered for and it gave me a profile. People still ask me about it.

Was that the highlight?

I would say just playing for my country was the highlight . . . I was very lucky to do so. And doing the haka. It's a great thing for Kiwis and gets us up and does

the same for the crowd. We're a multicultural country and the haka draws us together.

After retirement, you stayed very much involved in sport . . .

I got on the Warriors board and helped run their sponsorship for a while. I also started Fight for Life – a boxing promotional event for charity. I put the gloves on myself four times for three wins. It should actually have been four wins . . . only the judges saw it differently (laughs).

How did you get into promotion?

Tim Sheens wanted to bring the Raiders to Auckland for a pre-season game in 1992. I got behind it and we got a sellout crowd at Carlaw Park. I thought, 'Gee whiz . . . there could be money to be made here'. I got into boxing promotion and my company, Duco Events, has raised close to \$5 million for charity over the past 12 years. We've helped the Yellow Ribbon Trust, Ronald McDonald House and the Foundation of the Blind Guide Dogs. They gave me a New Zealand Order of Merit a few years ago and that was a proud moment.

Legend has it you have made millions and lost millions. True?

Promotions is a high-risk business and has its ups and downs. I've done some dumb things . . . I've lost \$1 million in a day. At one time, I lost everything and was living in a room in a rented house in Auckland paying \$80 a week – it was all I could afford. I came within days of winding up the whole business and being broke. It was stressful and caused me to lose a lot of sleep. But I learned from footy – you never, ever give up. I climbed out of the hole and am doing OK now.

Finally, another legendary story – did you really promote dwarf fighting?

(Laughs) That was about being an equal opportunities employer! And besides, they (the dwarves) wanted to do it. 

YOUR SHOUT

Send to: rlw@bauer-media.com.au
or RLW Your Shout, GPO Box 4088,
Sydney, NSW, 2001

LEICHHARDT IS BLACK AND GOLD ... NOT GREY!

I MIGHT BE AN OLD BLOKE BUT
I don't mind the NRL's Marvel Super
Heroes Round.

Punters love the comic book hero
jumpers and they'll be selling faster
than hot dogs on Mary Street before a
massive game at Leichhardt Oval – and
as a Tigers fan, I know how important
it is for my club to make a dollar
however it can.

But of all the weeks to run around
dressed up as 'War Machine', the
Tigers could have chosen a better date
than what could be our last outing at
the club's spiritual home.

For 81 years the likes of Keith
Barnes, Arthur Beetson, Wayne
Pearce, Benny Elias and 'Blocker'
Roach have graced the Leichhardt
Oval turf wearing black and gold ...
not grey!

To be honest, I'd never even heard
of War Machine. The only War Machine
I'm interested in is the Kiwi fella
wearing the No.13 – Kapow!

In 40 years, when people talk about
Leichhardt as one of the great old
memories of our great old game like
we currently eulogise Henson Park
and Lidcombe Oval, we'll be scratching
our heads as to why the Tigers were
dressed up like silver robotic soldiers
for the hallowed venue's send-off.

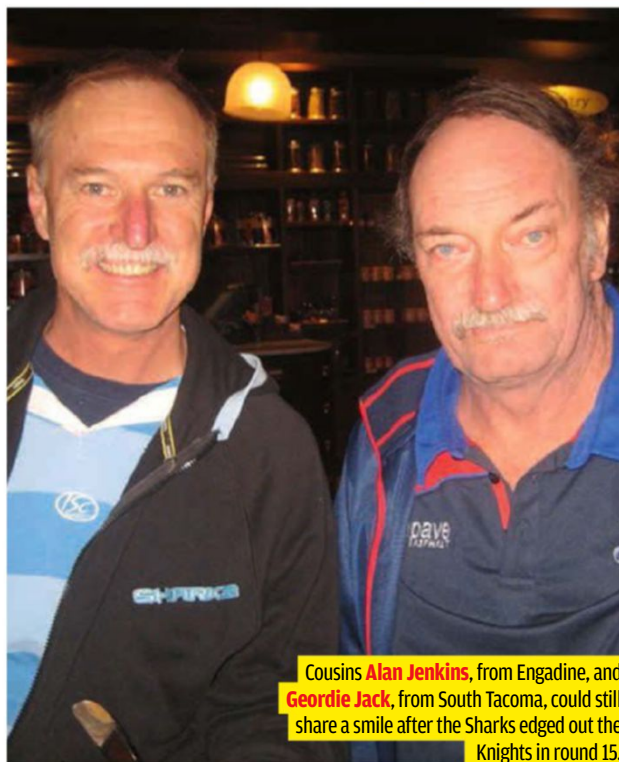
Ever since the Super League war,
clubs have rushed to sacrifice history
and heritage to chase the almighty
dollar. Sure, we celebrated Heritage
Round in round 19 – and how good
was it to see footy respecting its rich
traditions, and raising bucketloads
of money for the tremendous Men of
League Foundation – but honouring
our past shouldn't be confined to one
weekend a year.

Let's marvel at our game's colourful
history, not some hokey American
comic book character who's hijacked
what could be the Tigers' grand
farewell.

Ron Duckworth, Rozelle



It hasn't been all smooth
sailing for the Wests Tigers
this year but **Tim Holohan**
and **Tal Cohen** remain staunch
supporters of stars **Luke**
Brooks and **Sauaso Sue**.



Cousins **Alan Jenkins**, from Engadine, and
Geordie Jack, from South Tacoma, could still
share a smile after the Sharks edged out the
Knights in round 15.

what's
your
team
.com.au

THIS WEEK'S HOT SHOT WINS A \$100 VOUCHER AT WHAT'S YOUR TEAM

This week's Hot Shot, sent to us by **BEV KITTO**, receives a \$100
gift voucher to spend at What's Your Team

EMAIL: rlw@bauer-media.com.au

MAIL: True Fans, GPO Box 4088, Sydney NSW 2001



Bev Kitto is arguably the biggest Rabbitohs fan in South Australia! She's been a South Sydney fan for 50 years and celebrated their drought-breaking title win last year by having her car resprayed and reupholstered in the colours of her favourite club. Now, wherever she goes in SA, people stop to ask what a Rabbitoh is! So, because Bev is helping spread the gospel of rugby league, we reckon she deserves the \$100 voucher from What's Your Team.



Raiders fan **Shane Stallard** caught
up with a couple of Canberra's
young stars – **Lachlan Croker**,
Luke Bateman and **Haydon**
Hodge – at this year's NRL Nines.

**Rugby
LeagueWeek**

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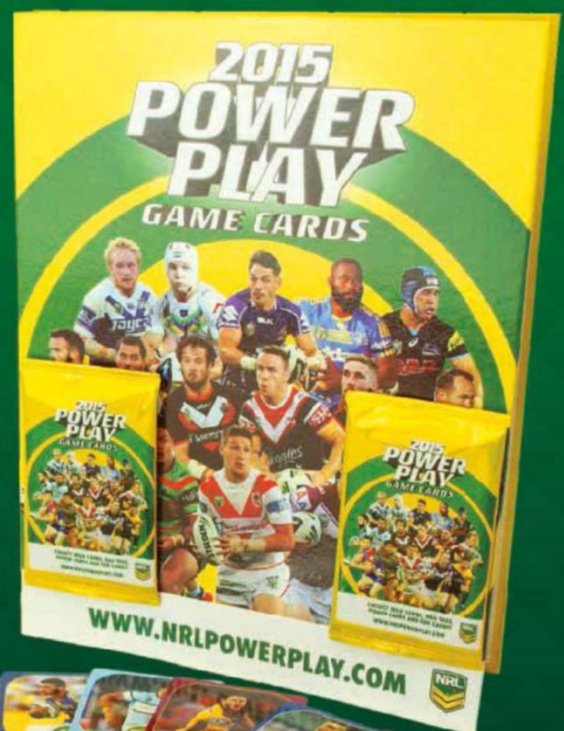


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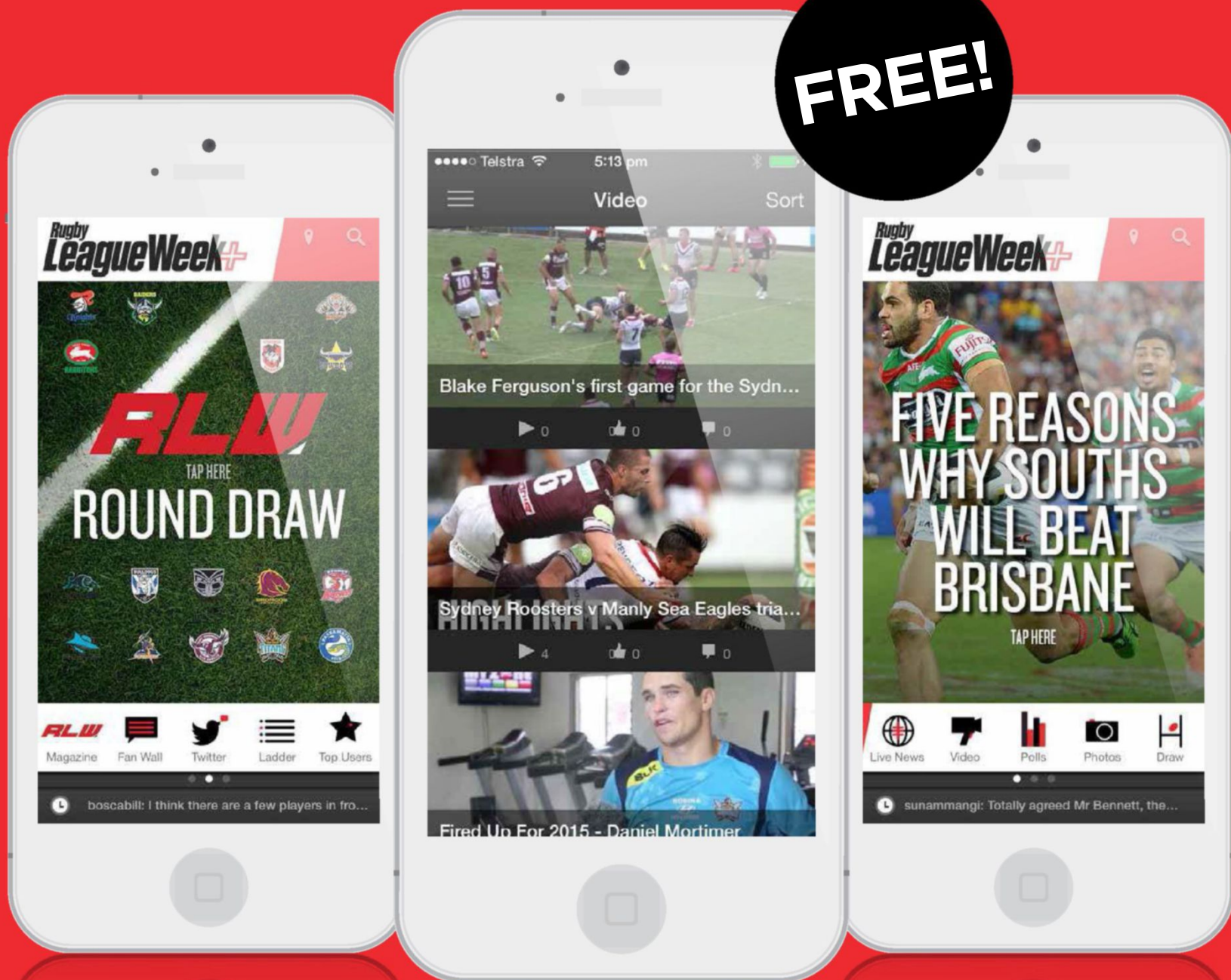


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